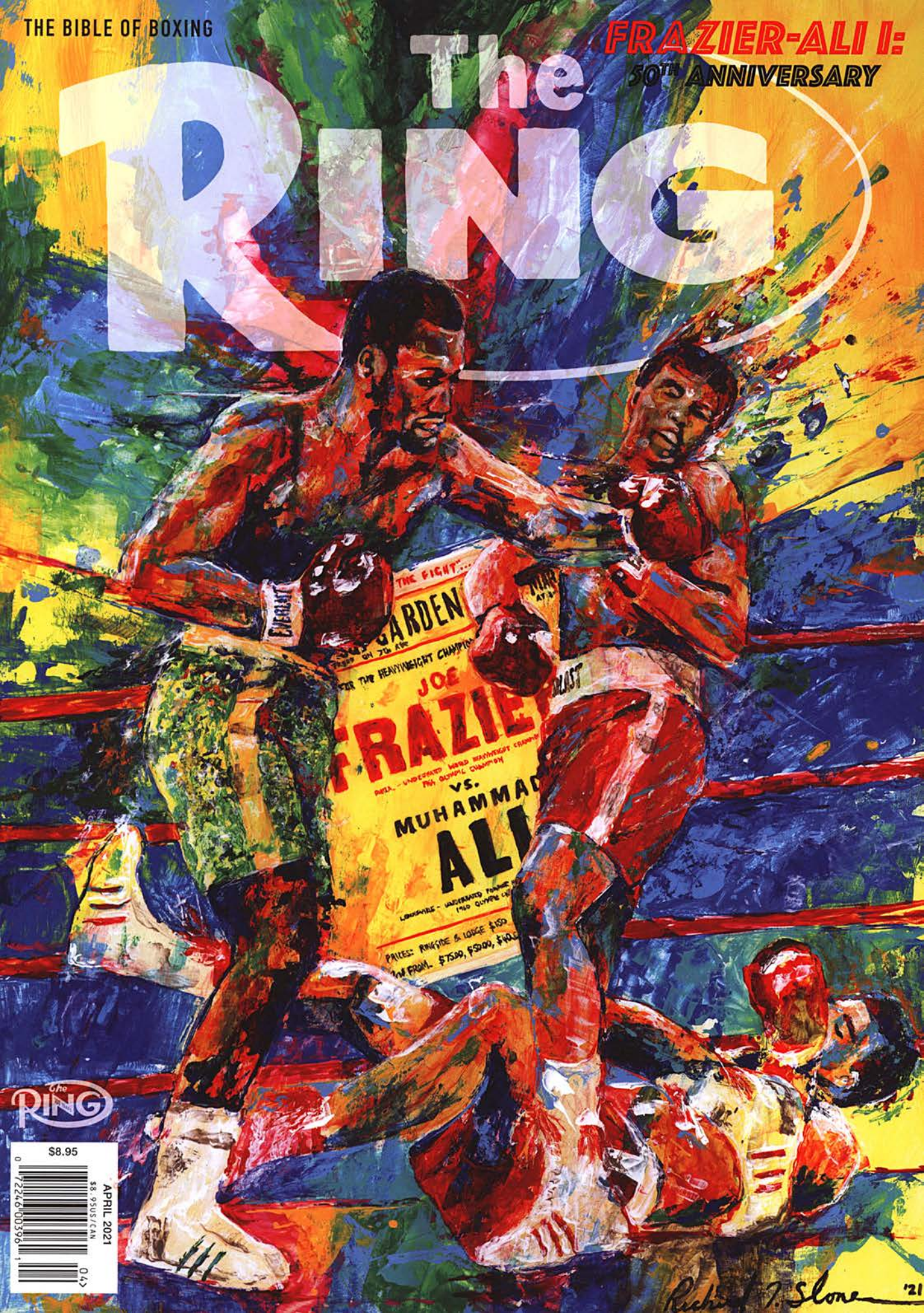
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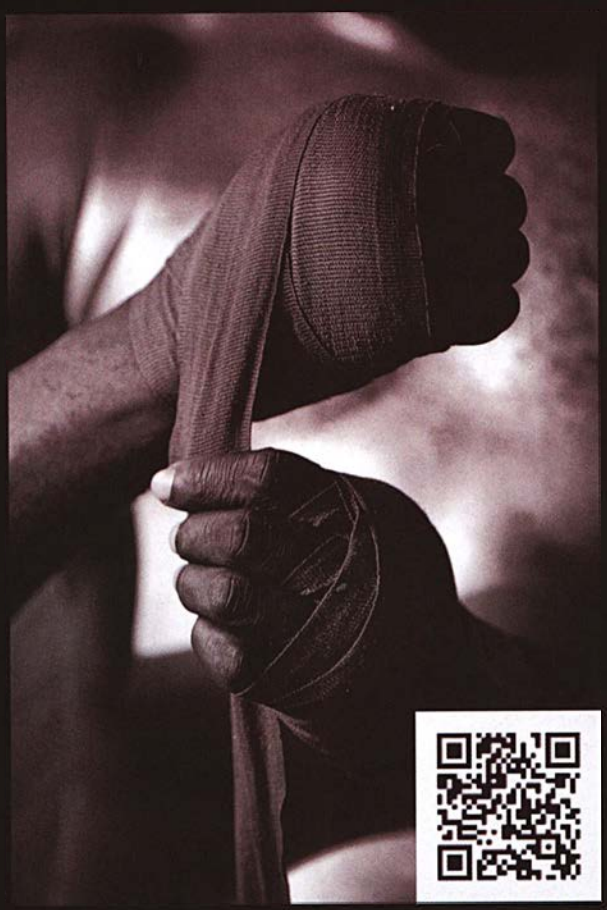

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OPENING SHOT

The new Madison Square Garden under construction in 1966. This 20,000-seat arena would open officially in 1968, and three years later it would be the venue for The Fight of the Century.

SHOW LARRY SOME LOVE

I really appreciated reading The Ring's all-time heavyweight rankings (May 2017 issue). Albeit a little late. Forgive me; 2020 has been a crazy year.

It's so difficult to do these types of rankings given the differences in nutrition, weight training, athletic skills and even size. Heavyweights have gotten demonstrably bigger over time. Given that, I cannot argue with the top two. I think it is clear that Muhammad Ali (No. 1) and Joe Louis (No. 2), at this point in history, are the two best heavyweights of all time. And I have both of them in my top five fighters of all time as well.

However, the one fighter I think was underrated on your ranking was Larry Holmes (No. 5, underneath Jack Johnson and Rocky Marciano). Probably not a huge shock, given that Holmes has become a synonym for underrated and underappreciated great champions. He only ruled the heavyweight division for nearly a decade, beat top-notch competition and was competitive for a world title even when he was way past his prime.

I understand some of the fascination with Marciano. And yes, I believe some of it is racial. I do not believe his resume would be as respected if he wasn't White. He was a White champion sandwiched between the Louis era and the rise of Black heavyweights of the 1960s (namely Muhammad Ali).

Marciano was a very good fighter who did beat great fighters who were past their prime later in his career. This may seem sacrilegious, but I believe Marciano's career was similar to Joe Calzaghe's, decades later. An undefeated and really good fighter who would not have beaten the all-time greats in their division in their primes.

Larry Holmes by almost any objective measure has to be considered the third-best heavyweight of all time. Its third-best champion. And a modern fighter who would've been a champion in any era.

I can only wonder, since you gave so much weight to Marciano's "O," will you give Floyd Mayweather Jr., who has a superior resume to the Brockton Bomber, the same consideration?

Kokayi Kwa Jitahidi
Los Angeles

POUND-FOR-POUND WORTHINESS

I'd like to say I was not surprised when Teofimo Lopez beat Vasiliy Lomachenko. In my opinion, Lomachenko should not have been considered pound-for-pound No. 1, with only 15 pro fights. Maybe they were considering his amateur career. I don't think amateur fights should be counted.

How about back in the day, fighters like Henry Armstrong fought in three different weight classes when there was a big difference in weight from one class to another. Or a fighter like Willie Pep, who had more than 200 pro fights. I don't know if pound-for-pound was around back then. If it was, Henry and Willie should have been in the pound-for-pound best – and too many others in that era to mention.

Angelo C. Colella
Lynn, Mass.

THE WORDSMITH OF MYTH

Having read Ron Lipton's mythical matchup essays – Dick Tiger vs. Canelo Alvarez (December 2020) and Rocky Graziano vs. Rubin Hurricane Carter (May 2020) – I, too, like reader Arnie Rifkin, was amazed and enthralled with Lipton's amazing capture in words of both of these would-be superbouts! Yes, Lipton possesses a unique talent to bring such creative boxing interest and excitement to your readers.

Robert Atkinson
Fenton, Mich.

IRREGULAR

I saw in the February 2021 issue that The Ring has Xu Can listed as the WBA featherweight champion in the ratings section. I was confused by this for a few reasons: 1. Xu Can currently holds the WBA "Regular" version of the featherweight belt, and I was under the impression that The Ring does not currently recognize the WBA "Regular" belt. 2. Leo Santa Cruz is still the holder of the WBA "Super" featherweight belt, I thought?

Alexander Capaldo
Denver

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: The Ring will recognize a WBA "Regular" title when there is no "Super" beltholder to outrank them, but in this case you are correct: Santa Cruz, even though he hasn't fought at 126 pounds for over two years, apparently still holds the title.

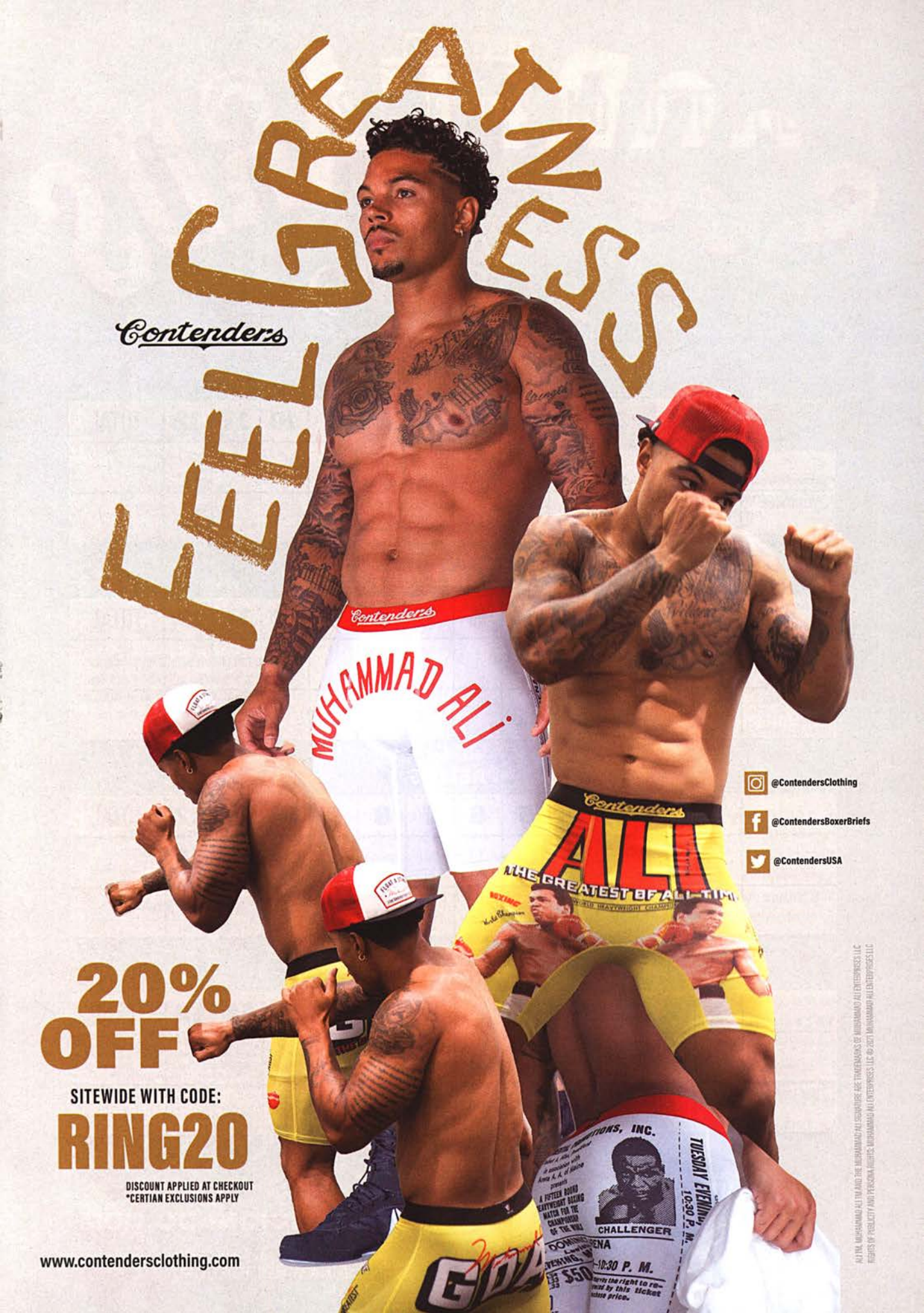
When Santa Cruz won the WBA 130-pound title by outpointing Miguel Flores in November 2019, we wrongly assumed that the veteran would have to vacate his WBA featherweight title per the sanctioning organization's rules, which state:

"An Association Champion can have only one world title in one division at the same time. If a World Champion wishes to fight for a title in another division, he must apply in writing to the Championships Committee for approval and must present a signed document undertaking that, in the event he wins the fight and obtains the other title, within five (5) days of the fight he will choose the title he wishes to retain and relinquish the other title."

Obviously, this rule did not apply to Santa Cruz, nor does it apply to Gervonta Davis, who relieved the four-division beltholder of the WBA 130-pound title on October 31 while still holding the organization's "regular" lightweight strap.

Even we find it difficult to keep up with the WBA's "super ridiculous" system sometimes. Thanks for pointing out the error.

WRITE TO THE RING! Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209 comeoutwriting@gmail.com
★ Emailed letters will include a writer's email address unless a city and state of origin are provided. Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.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THE RING (ISSN: 0035-5410), Vol. 100, NO. 4 (APRIL 2021), is published 12 times per year by Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC, P.O. Box 90254 Brooklyn, NY 11209. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11209 and additional post offices. Postmasters: Send change of address notices to: THE RING, P.O. Box 433122, Palm Coast, FL 32164-3122. Single copy price $8.95 in U.S.A. and Canada (£5.99 in the U.K.). Subscription price U.S. and possession $39.99 for 12 issues including Canada. Mexico add $5. All remaining countries add $10 for 12 issues per year. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2020 Sports and Entertainment Publications, LLC. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy of the content of advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: advertising@sepublications.com. U.S. / Canadian and International distribution by Comag Marketing Group LLC, 155 Village Blvd #200, Princeton, NJ 08540. UK distribution by Seymour Distribution Ltd., 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, England, EC1A 9PT. Printed In U.S.A.

RINGSIDE BY RICHARD SLONE

SMOKE, BEES AND BUTTERFLIES

The great Smokin' Joe Frazier was both friend and mentor to our cover artist, Richard Slone.

I met Joe Frazier at the Thomas A'Becket gym in London in 1989. I was down there working out (I was an amateur boxer) and Joe was in town promoting the documentary *Champions Forever.* He saw me hitting the bag, we got along really well, and just one year later I was in Philadelphia with him. As soon as I finished school, I flew to Philadelphia, signed up with him, and he started training me. I didn't turn professional, but I stayed with Joe for 10 years.

We were the best of friends; he could discuss anything with me, and there was so much trust. His traits inside the ring – the intensity, the dedication – he also carried those outside the ring, too. Joe always stuck to his word; his word was his bond, and he did his best to be a great human being. He had so much willpower, so much character, and he didn't fear anything. If someone was out of line, he didn't respect that, whether it was his own blood or a stranger on the street. One of his famous quotes was, "There's no right way to do wrong and no wrong way to do right." I've said a few times he was the toughest man I ever met and the kindest man I ever met. You only come across someone like Joe once in a lifetime, and you could never wish for a better friend.

I met Muhammad Ali in 1992 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I went to an event with Joe as his aide and Ali showed up without an aide, so I ended up helping him out, too. All three of us had to ride in a limo together from the airport to the hotel. I got to know Ali pretty well and, to this day, some of Ali's family members are some of my best friends. Ali was an amazing person. Like Joe, he did a lot of things that people don't know about in terms of charity work and things of that nature.

In the late '60s, there was such a strong racial divide and there was the Vietnam War. Ali took one side. Joe never took any side, and Ali's view on that was, "You're not one of us!" Joe's response was, "Hey, it's my job to fight in the ring, and I don't know anything about politics!" But after he

LeRoy Nieman's iconic artwork for The Rumble in the Jungle.

retired from boxing, Ali became much more peaceful and humble. He really was a wonderful guy.

As fighters and attractions, they were totally different. Ali liked to be the pretty boy, and Joe didn't care about any of that. Joe was a good-looking guy, too, but he was so humble about it. He would give away signed photographs of himself and say to people, "I'm so ugly, you can put that in the basement and it'll scare away the rats." Joe didn't use the word "pretty" like Ali did. He had no vanity; he was a man's man, and Ali was all about showmanship. But as different as they were, I really believed Ali when he said, "If God ever calls me to a holy war, I want Joe Frazier fighting beside me."

"The Fight of the Century" was the perfect storm. It was the first major fight to draw women, the Hollywood contingent and politicians. Everybody who was somebody was there, or they were trying to be there. There was the glitz, the glamour, and you even had the biggest drug dealers in New York in the arena that night; Frank Lucas was there. You were either an Ali fan or a Frazier fan and, just like today, there was this tremendous conflict throughout the nation, which heightened the stakes. There's never been an event like it. "The Thrilla in Manila" was a great fight, but in "The Fight of the Century," they were both undefeated, both in their 20s, it was held at Madison Square Garden, and the stars aligned. That was Joe's finest hour.

This cover firstly pays homage to LeRoy Neiman, the official ringside artist in 1971, and I have utilized his color palette. LeRoy was a friend and he had a huge influence on me. He would have been 100 years old this coming June, so it's a fitting tribute to accompany the 50th anniversary of "The Fight." This cover is also the first time that I've painted Joe since he passed away on November 7, 2011. It's just so difficult to paint him. As I sit here right now, the hair on the back of my neck is standing on end because it's a chance for me to make him proud. He always had belief in me, he gave me so many opportunities, and to be part of this is one of my biggest honors. To be a pallbearer at his funeral was a massive honor, but this is massive for me, too. This is a painting that will stay in my collection forever; it comes from the soul, and it's important for me because I knew both guys. In a way, it's like painting family, it's like painting a moment from childhood. It's hard to find the words, but this tribute means so much to me.

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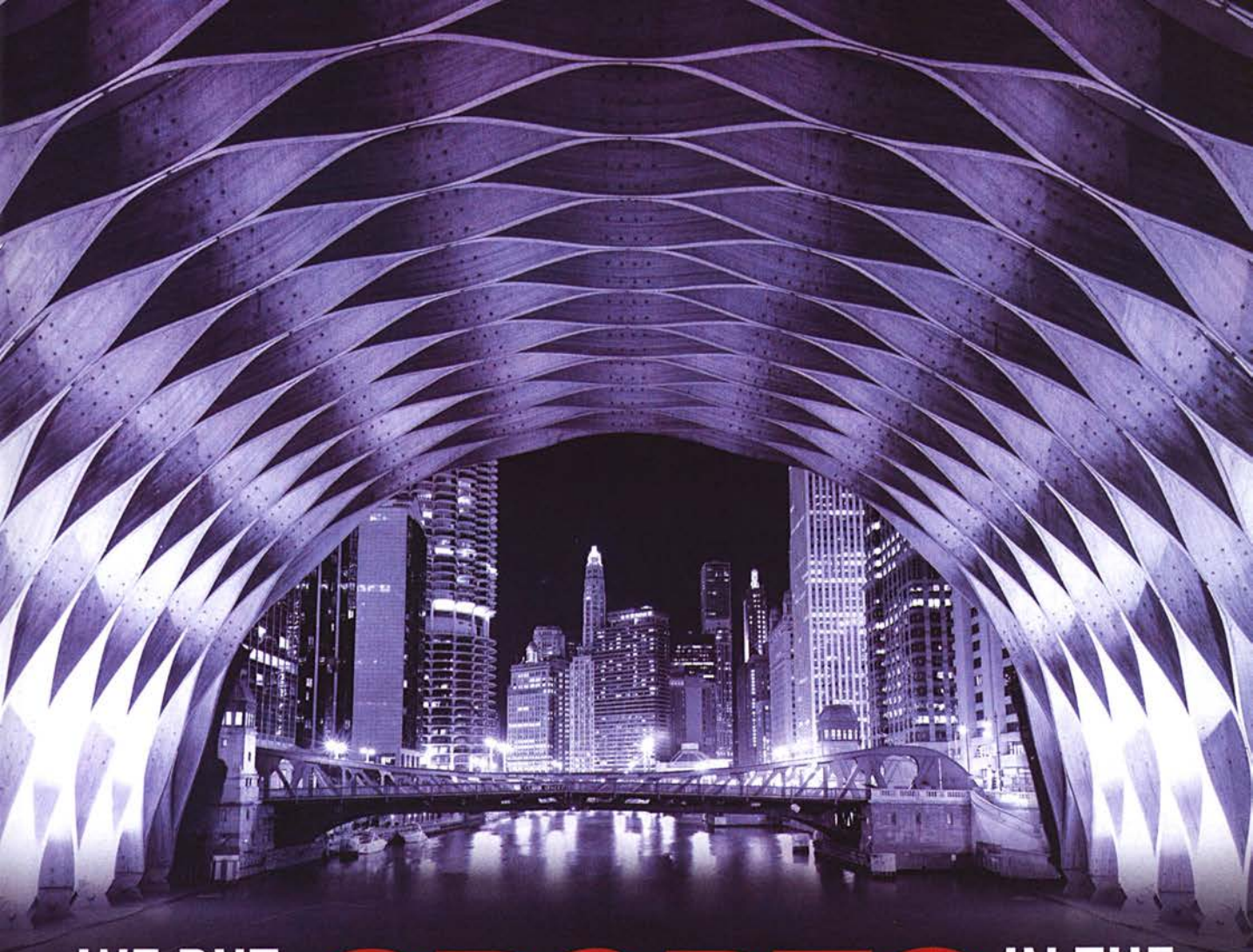

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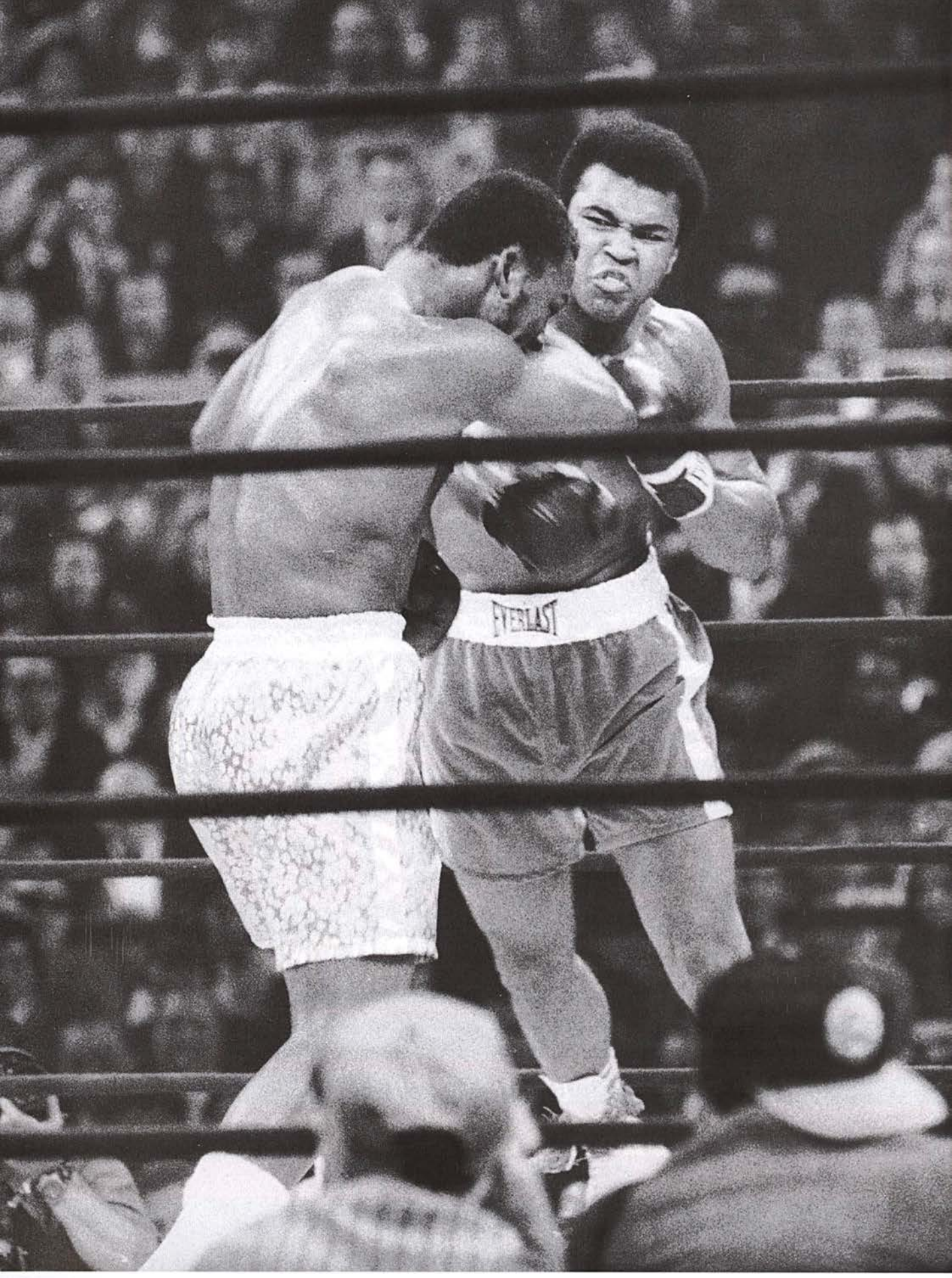

EVERLAST

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

I WAS AT ALI-FRAZIER I . . . AND TWO POSTSCRIPTS DECADES LATER

In early 1971, I read that Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier had signed to fight at Madison Square Garden. I'd graduated from Columbia Law School the year before and was clerking for a federal judge prior to a five-year stint as a litigator on Wall Street. The United States Supreme Court had yet to rule on Ali's appeal of his 1967 conviction for refusing induction into the United States Army. But a recent federal court ruling had allowed him to return to the ring while his appeal was pending.

It was clear that Ali-Frazier would be a memorable event – two great fighters, each one undefeated with a legitimate claim to the heavyweight championship of the world. Just as clearly, it would transcend sports.

Tickets for the fight were priced from $20 to $150. The day they went on sale, I bought two mezzanine seats at $20 apiece. On fight night, scalpers were getting 10 times those numbers.

I went to the fight with a friend. Entering the Garden, I bought an official program that had a LeRoy Neiman painting of Ali and Frazier on the cover. The arena was jammed. There was electricity in the air. Superstars who were accustomed to sitting in the front row on camera were 15 rows from ringside and happy to be there. Frank Sinatra finagled a press credential by agreeing to photograph the fight for Life magazine. Thousands of fans stood outside the arena just to watch the celebrities come in.

None of the preliminary fights were slated for more than six rounds. The most notable undercard bout featured Ali's brother, Rahaman, against Danny McAlinden.

Rahaman had fought on the undercard of both Ali-Liston fights and Ali versus Oscar Bonavena. His record stood at seven wins and no losses with three knockouts. McAlinden was a heavyweight born in Northern Ireland who had moved to England. His record was 14-1-2 with 13 KOs.

Fights in New York were scored at that time on a round-by-round basis, not on points. McAlinden won a 4-2, 3-2-1, 3-3 majority decision.

As the night wore on, the tension grew.

Finally, it was time.

"I've covered sports for a half-century," Jerry Izenberg reminisced years later. "I've been to every kind of championship and seen every great athlete of the past 50 years. No moment I've ever seen had the electricity of Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier coming down the aisle and entering the ring that night."

People forget how young Ali and Frazier were then. Muhammad was 29, Joe only 27. But even though some of Ali's greatest ring triumphs lay in the future, he was already growing old as a fighter. So was Joe.

The fight was close in the early rounds. The crowd was evenly divided. But as the night wore on, Frazier's fans had more reason to cheer.

I remember Ali going to the ropes, beckoning Frazier in. I remember Round 11 when Joe wobbled Muhammad with a big left hook. And most painfully, I remember the 15th round when Frazier hit Ali as hard as a man can be hit and Muhammad went down. At that point, the fight was lost. My hope was that Ali would be able to finish with dignity on his feet. He did, although the decision went against him by an 11-4, 9-6, 8-6-1 margin.

Ali-Frazier was Muhammad's first "superfight." Against Sonny Liston in 1964, Cassius Clay had been widely perceived as nothing more than a kid coming to get beaten up. Ali-Liston II in 1965 drew only 2,000 paying fans. Now, when it mattered most and the world truly cared, "The Greatest" had failed.

I left Madison Square Garden that night feeling depressed but knowing that I had witnessed something historic.

Fast-forward 20 years to April 14, 1991. I'd left the practice of law to write and, by a twist of fate, had become Ali's biographer. The manuscript for *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* was complete and would be published in several months. I was with Ali at a hotel in Philadelphia (Frazier's hometown) for a black-tie gala celebrating the 20th anniversary of the first Ali-Frazier fight.

Hauser was one of the privileged fight fans who witnessed the first chapter of the Ali-Frazier rivalry live.

Late that afternoon, I went to the dining room to look around. The hotel staff was setting up. Howard Bingham (Ali's best friend and personal photographer) was sitting on the edge of a table, talking with a man who was wearing a tuxedo and a green-black-and-red kufi.

"This is someone you should meet," Howard told me.

Because the man was sitting, I didn't realize how big he was.

"I'm Jim," the man said.

He stood up and extended his hand.

And the realization hit.

"Jim Brown," I blurted out.

"No," he corrected. "Just Jim."

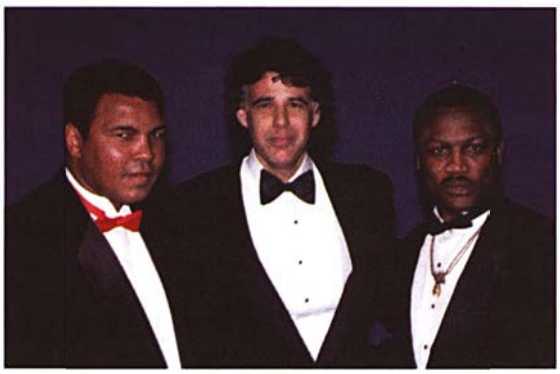
I'd met Frazier 28 months earlier at the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas. Two days of taping were underway at the time for a documentary entitled Champions Forever that would feature Ali, Joe, George Foreman, Ken Norton and Larry Holmes. I'd been there with Muhammad to conduct interviews as part of the research for my book.

Initially, Frazier wouldn't talk with me in Las Vegas because I was "Ali's man." But at an evening party after the second day of taping, Joe approached me. He'd been drinking. And the bile spewed out:

"I hated Ali. God might not like me talking that way, but it's in my heart. First two fights, he tried to make me a white man. Then he tried to make me a nigger. How would you like it if your kids came home from school crying because everyone was calling their daddy a gorilla? God made us all the way we are. He made us the way we talk and look. And the way I feel, I'd like to fight Ali-Clay-whatever-his-name-is again tomorrow. I still want to take him apart, piece by piece, and send him back to Jesus."

Joe saw that I was writing down every word. This was a message he wanted the world to hear.

"I didn't ask no favors of him, and he didn't ask none of me. He shook me in Manila; he won. But I sent him home worse than he came. Look at him now. He's damaged goods. I know it; you know it. Everyone knows it; they just don't want to say. He was always making fun of me. I'm the dummy; I'm the one getting hit in the head. Tell me now; him or me, which one talks worse now? He can't talk no more, and he still tries to make noise. He still wants you to think he's the greatest, and he ain't. I don't care how the world looks at him. I see him different, and I know him better than anyone. Manila really don't matter no more. He's finished, and I'm still here."



There's a painful secret lurking behind this seemingly innocent group photo.

April 14, 1991, in Philadelphia was to be Frazier's night. After all, Joe had won Ali-Frazier I. But 20 years after that fight, his hatred for all things Ali remained palpable. Now, during the cocktail hour, Howard suggested that I pose for a photo with Muhammad and Joe. I stood between them. Joe wrapped his arm around my waist in what I thought was a gesture of friendship. Then, just as Howard snapped the photo, Joe dug his fingers into the flesh beneath my ribs.

It hurt like hell.

I tried to pry his hand away.

You try prying Joe Frazier's hand away.

When Joe was satisfied that he'd inflicted sufficient pain, he smirked at me and walked off.

Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times was published in June 1991. Someone read Joe the parts in the book that were about him, and he decided that I'd treated him fairly. In the years that followed, when our paths crossed, he was warm and friendly. A ritual greeting evolved between us.

Joe would smile and say, "Hey! How's my Jewish friend?"

I'd smile and say, "Hey! How's my Baptist friend?"

That led to the afternoon of January 7, 2005. Joe was in my home. We were eating ice cream in the kitchen.

Then Joe said something that surprised me.

"Do you remember that time I gave you the claw?"

"I remember," I said grimly.

"I'm sorry, man. I apologize."

That was Joe Frazier. He remembered every hurt that anyone ever inflicted upon him. With regard to Ali, he carried those hurts like broken glass in his stomach for his entire life. But Joe also remembered the hurts he'd inflicted on other people. And if he felt he'd done wrong, given time he would try to right the situation.

As for Ali . . . Talking about Joe, Muhammad told me, "I'm sorry Joe Frazier is mad at me. I'm sorry I hurt him. Joe Frazier is a good man. I couldn't have done what I did without him, and he couldn't have done what he did without me. And if God ever calls me to a holy war, I want Joe Frazier fighting beside me." RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In December 2019, he was selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

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RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of Jan. 16, 2021

Gennadiy Golovkin was back in frightening form in December.

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

POUND FOR POUND: Scorecards were just a formality after Canelo Alvarez (No. 1) finished bullying Callum Smith around for 12 rounds in Texas on December 19. Shorter by seven inches, Alvarez did at times resemble a lumberjack plying his trade – a lumberjack who fell out of a tree as a child and now lives only for the grim pleasure of vengeance by pulping entire forests with a blunt axe – but Smith did manage to stay upright until the final bell. After watching the way Canelo worked the Liverpudlian over with vicious efficiency, every hook and uppercut a dose of malice wrapped in skill, many observers who had doubted the Mexican superstar's position atop the P4P list could only say, "OK, now I get it."

The night before, in Florida, Gennadiy Golovkin gave a vintage display of his own surgical truculence, grinding Kamil Szeremeta down to the point that the last of four knockdowns was the result of a jab. GGG was in great form, but it seems increasingly likely that he can only look that way against people not named Canelo, who only seems to get bigger and better. And in fact, Golovkin's long tenure on the P4P list came to an end when four-division titlist Kazuto Ioka replaced him at No. 10 following an eighth-round stoppage of Kosei Tanaka.

HEAVYWEIGHT: A year after his draw with Alexander Povetkin in Saudi Arabia, Michael Hunter resumed his career with a fourth-round knockout of Shawn Laughery (unrated) and held his position at No. 8.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Ilunga Makabu (No. 2) concluded the first defense of his WBC title with a left hook that stunned Olanrewaju Durodola (unrated) and led to a TKO in Round 7. That same night in South Africa, Kevin Lerena (No. 4) also shook off some rust with a fifth-round stoppage of Patrick Ferguson (unrated).

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: With the victory over Smith, who started the night as Ring champion, Canelo (No. 4 last month) took the crown – along with the WBA and WBC belts – and knocked the loser down to No. 3.

In Florida, Smith's countryman John Ryder (No. 7) fared better on the scorecards but was unremarkable in his 10-round decision over Mike Guy (a fight in which both fighters will be remembered as "that guy").

MIDDLEWEIGHT: Golovkin's victory was a solid one, but he's already touching the ceiling at No. 1. However, the path was cleared for *some*body to move higher after Canelo (division champ last month) vacated his 160-pound titles. Szeremeta (No. 6 last month) dropped off the list, which made room for 2016 Olympian and GGG countryman Zhanibek Alimkhanuly to return at No. 10.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Tim Tszyu swatted Kiwi opponent Bowyn Morgan to the canvas with a right hand in Round 1 – not a win meaningful enough to raise him from No. 10, but it's nice to see excitement once again swirling around the Tszyu family name.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Ryan Garcia (No. 5 last month) probably gave his promoter, Oscar De La Hoya, a mild heart attack when he hit the canvas on a left cross from Luke Campbell in Round 2, but it ended up being the kind of breakthrough performance that Garcia, Golden Boy and possibly the sport of boxing needed. The kid got up and proceeded to take control, ultimately avenging the knockdown with a highlight-reel liver shot in the seventh round. Campbell dropped from No. 4 to No. 6 and Garcia rose to No. 2. The win earned Garcia a shot at WBC titleholder Devin Haney, but the social media savant sees more potential (aka cash) in a grudge match with Gervonta Davis.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: Masayuki Ito (No. 9 last month) was removed after losing a majority decision to Hironori Mishiro (unrated). The question of who to bring in as a replacement was answered by Venezuela's Roger Gutierrez, who entered at No. 8 after winning a unanimous decision over No. 6-rated Rene Alvarado, with a trio of knockdowns securing a one-point advantage on all three cards. Alvarado dropped to No. 9.

BANTAMWEIGHT: By unanimous opinion of the Ring Ratings panelists, No. 4-rated Emmanuel Rodriguez had done enough to beat Reymart Gaballo (unrated) on December 19 in Connecticut, but two ringside judges favored the Filipino and handed him a win. The suggestion was made to split the difference between the "official" and the obvious result by dropping Rodriguez a notch and bringing in Gaballo at No. 10, but some panelists were uncomfortable with any amount of compromise. There have been cases in the past when The Ring has thrown out egregious decisions when it comes to their effect on the ratings, and this was determined to be one of those times. The official result was ignored and the list didn't change.

Takuma Inoue held on to his No. 6 position, beating Keita Kurihara (unrated) via ninth-round technical decision after a clash-induced cut opened above Kurihara's eye.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: Ioka (No. 3) held his position after the left-hook stoppage of Tanaka, who was coming in as The Ring's No. 1-rated flyweight.

FLYWEIGHT: With Tanaka moving up to face Ioka, everyone on the list gained a notch and McWilliams Arroyo took the vacancy at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Felix Alvarado rose from No. 4 to No. 2 after defending his title with a 10th-round stoppage of DeeJay Kriel (unrated), handing the tough South African his first loss since his pro debut.

STRAWWEIGHT: Like many fighters waylaid by lockdowns in 2020, No. 10-rated Melvin Jerusalem took his first fight in over a year against a soft opponent, knocking out Jayson Francisco (unrated) in the second round to hold his position on the list.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ**
   Mexico • 54-1-2 (36 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE**
   Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
   U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
4. **ALEKSANDR USYK**
   Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
5. **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
   U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
6. **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
   U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
7. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
   Ukraine • 14-2-0 (12 KOs)
8. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
   Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)
9. **JOSH TAYLOR**
   U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
10. **KAZUTO IOKA**
    Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)

Canelo Alvarez maintained his No. 1 position (and also picked up the 168-pound championship) courtesy of a dominant 12-round unanimous decision win over Callum Smith.

MICHELLE FARSI/MATCHROOM MICHELLE FARSI/MATCHROOM

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- **C** **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC
  U.K. • 30-0-1 (21 KOs)
- **1** **ANTHONY JOSHUA** IBF, WBA, WBO
  U.K. • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **DEONTAY WILDER**
  U.S. • 42-1-1 (41 KOs)
- **3** **ALEXANDER POVETKIN**
  Russia • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
- **4** **DILLIAN WHYTE**
  U.K. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **5** **LUIS ORTIZ**
  Cuba • 32-2-0 (27 KOs)
- **6** **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH PARKER**
  New Zealand • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MICHAEL HUNTER**
  U.S. • 19-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **9** **OSCAR RIVAS**
  Colombia • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **ALEKSANDR USYK**
  Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- **C** **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF
  Latvia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **1** **YUNIEL DORTICOS**
  Cuba • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC
  Congo • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3** **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
  Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **KEVIN LERENA**
  S. Africa • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **5** **ANDREW TABITI**
  U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **LAWRENCE OKOLIE**
  U.K. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** WBA
  France • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **THABISO MCHUNU**
  S. Africa • 22-5-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **ALEKSEI PAPIN**
  Russia • 12-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **MICHAL CIESLAK**
  Poland • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC
  Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **2** **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA
  Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **SERGEY KOVALEV**
  Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)
- **4** **JOE SMITH JR.**
  U.S. • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **5** **JEAN PASCAL**
  Canada • 35-6-1 (20 KOs)
- **6** **BADOU JACK**
  Sweden • 23-3-3 (13 KOs)
- **7** **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
  Colombia • 25-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **MARCUS BROWNE**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **UMAR SALAMOV**
  Russia • 25-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **10** **LYNDON ARTHUR**
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- **C** **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC
  Mexico • 54-1-2 (36 KOs)
- **1** **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
  U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **2** **CALEB PLANT** IBF
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **CALLUM SMITH**
  U.K. • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
  U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **5** **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** WBO
  U.K. • 30-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **6** **CALEB TRUAX**
  U.S. • 31-4-2 (19 KOs)
- **7** **JOHN RYDER**
  U.K. • 29-5-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
  Russia • 23-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **DAVID LEMIEUX**
  Canada • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
- **10** **DANIEL JACOBS**
  U.S. • 37-3-0 (30 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 16, 2021

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kazakhstan • 41-1-1 (36 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 29-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** WBA
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **7** **ROB BRANT**
  U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **8** **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-2-1 (18 KOs)
- **9** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 36-0-0 (29 KOs)
- **10** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, WBC, IBF, WBA
  U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **1** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **2** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 27-3-3 (15 KOs)
- **3** **JEISON ROSARIO**
  Dom. Rep. • 20-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
  U.S. • 27-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **5** **BRIAN CASTANO**
  Argentina • 16-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **6** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **MICHEL SORO**
  France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- **9** **PATRICK TEIXEIRA** WBO
  Brazil • 31-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **10** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
- **3** **MANNY PACQUIAO** WBA
  Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **4** **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **5** **SHAWN PORTER**
  U.S. • 31-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **6** **YORDENIS UGAS**
  Cuba • 26-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **DANNY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
  Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **SERGEY LIPINETS**
  Russia • 16-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **10** **MIKEY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 40-1-0 (30 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA
  U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **JOSE RAMIREZ** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **2** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 25-1-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL**
  Ukraine • 31-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **IVAN BARANCHYK**
  Russia • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **KIRYL RELIKH**
  Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **9** **BATYRZHAN JUKEMBAYEV**
  Kazakhstan • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)

Kevin Lerena (right) retained his No. 4 position at 200 pounds with a dominant fifth-round stoppage of American Patrick Ferguson. The South African star is closing in on a world title shot.

Tim Tszyu, son of former undisputed junior welterweight champion Kostya Tszyu, blasted out Bowyn Morgan in a single round and kept his No. 10 spot at 154 pounds.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBA, WBO, IBF
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 14-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 29-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **5** **ROBERT EASTER**
  U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **6** **LUKE CAMPBELL**
  U.K. • 20-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
- **8** **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-5-0 (29 KOs)
- **9** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **MASAYOSHI NAKATANI**
  Japan • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

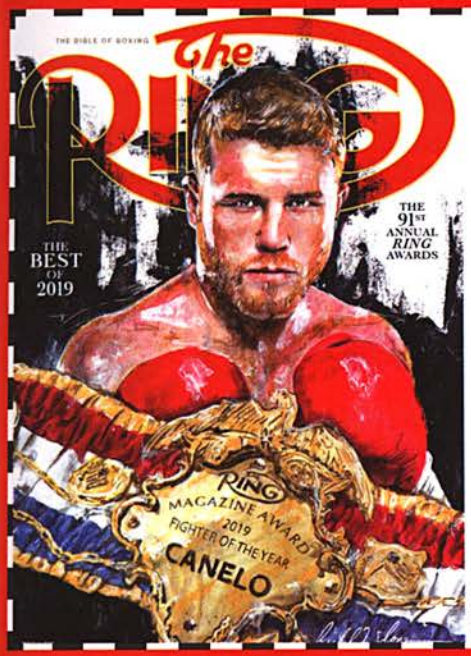
- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **MIGUEL BERCHELT** WBC
  Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- **2** **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** IBF
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JAMEL HERRING** WBO
  U.S. • 22-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **TEVIN FARMER**
  U.S. • 30-5-1 (6 KOs)
- **6** **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **7** **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **8** **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
  Venezuela • 25-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **9** **RENE ALVARADO**
  Nicaragua • 32-9-0 (21 KOs)
- **10** **MASAYUKI ITO**
  Japan • 26-3-1 (14 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **JOSH WARRINGTON**
  U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** WBC
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **XU CAN**
  China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **4** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (27 KOs)
- **6** **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **7** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **9** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RUBEN VILLA**
  U.S. • 18-1-0 (5 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **REY VARGAS**
  Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **3** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **4** **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- **5** **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 21-0-1 (16 KOs)
- **6** **ANGELO LEO** WBO
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA**
  Japan • 22-2-2 (15 KOs)
- **8** **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
  Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **9** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)
- **10** **STEPHEN FULTON**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)



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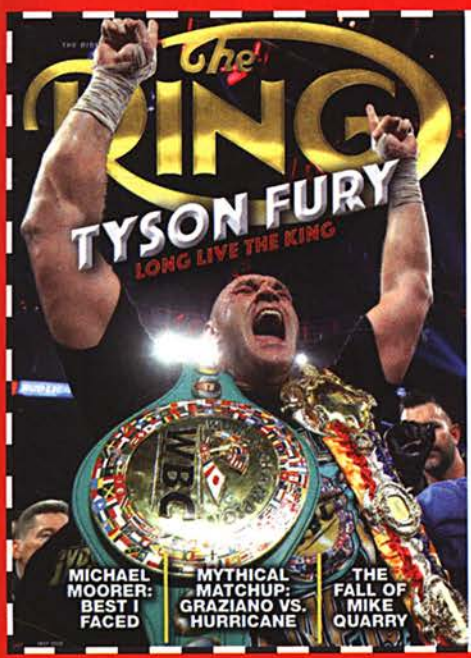

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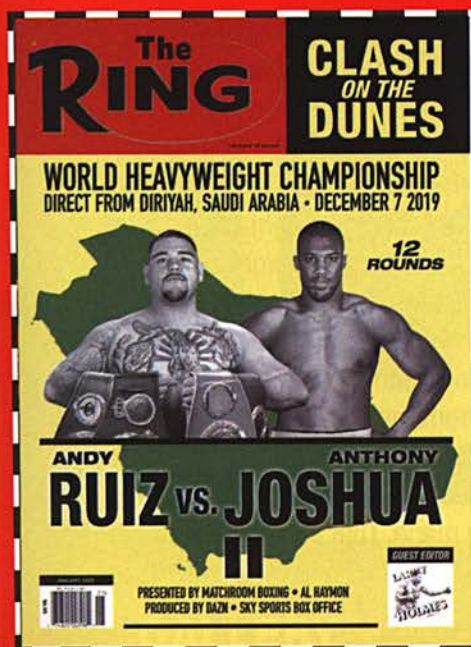

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RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 16, 2021

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)

1 **NONITO DONAIRE**
Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)

2 **NORDINE OUBAALI** WBC
France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)

3 **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
Philippines • 30-4-0 (21 KOs)

4 **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
Puerto Rico • 19-2-0 (12 KOs)

5 **ZOLANI TETE**
S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)

6 **TAKUMA INOUE**
Japan • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)

7 **JASON MOLONEY**
Australia • 21-2-0 (18 KOs)

8 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)

9 **OSCAR NEGRETE**
U.S. • 19-2-2 (7 KOs)

10 **MIKE PLANIA**
Philippines • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBC
Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)

1 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 49-5-1 (42 KOs)

2 **ROMAN GONZALEZ** WBA
Nicaragua • 50-2-0 (41 KOs)

3 **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)

4 **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)

5 **KHALID YAFAI**
U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)

6 **JOSHUA FRANCO**
U.S. • 17-1-2 (8 KOs)

7 **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
Mexico • 33-4-1 (24 KOs)

8 **ANDREW MOLONEY**
Australia • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)

9 **JEYVIER CINTRON**
Puerto Rico • 11-1-0 (5 KOs)

10 **CARLOS CUADRAS**
Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **MORUTI MTHALANE** IBF
S. Africa • 39-2-0 (26 KOs)

2 **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
Mexico • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

3 **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)

4 **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
Japan • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)

5 **MASAYUKI KURODA**
Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)

6 **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)

7 **JAY HARRIS**
U.K. • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)

8 **ANGEL ACOSTA**
Puerto Rico • 21-2-0 (21 KOs)

9 **JOSELITO VELAZQUEZ**
Mexico • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)

10 **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
Puerto Rico • 20-4-0 (15 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)

1 **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
Japan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)

2 **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
Nicaragua • 36-2-0 (31 KOs)

3 **HEKKIE BUDLER**
S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)

4 **CARLOS CANIZALES**
Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)

5 **ELWIN SOTO** WBO
Mexico • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)

6 **TETSUYA HISADA**
Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)

7 **EDWARD HENO**
Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)

8 **SHO KIMURA**
Japan • 19-3-2 (12 KOs)

9 **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
Argentina • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)

10 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)

Ryan Garcia jumped to No. 2 at 135 pounds thanks to a career-best win over Luke Campbell, who dropped to No. 6.

Kazuto Ioka (right) defended his junior bantamweight title by stopping Kosei Tanaka, a performance strong enough to put Ioka on the P4P list.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
Thailand • 21-0-0 (7 KOs)

2 **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
Thailand • 35-1-0 (22 KOs)

3 **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
Thailand • 54-1-0 (18 KOs)

4 **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)

5 **BYRON ROJAS**
Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)

6 **VIC SALUDAR**
Phil. • 20-4-0 (11 KOs)

7 **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)

8 **SIMPIWE KONKCO**
S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)

9 **PEDRO TADURAN** IBF
Phil. • 14-2-1 (11 KOs)

10 **MELVIN JERUSALEM**
Phil. • 16-2-0 (10 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

ILLUSTRATIONS & CARTOONS

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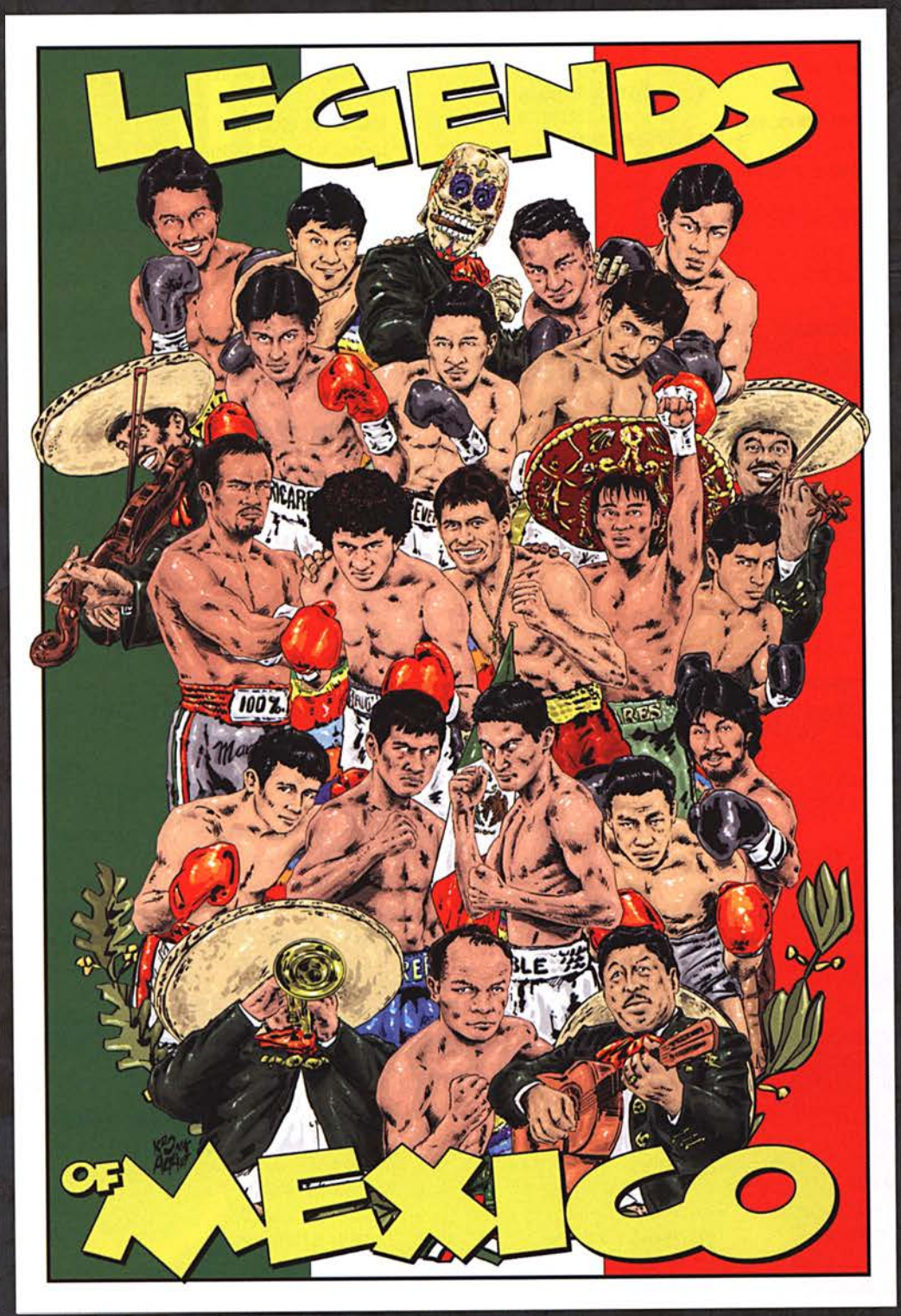
WITH A FOCUS ON BOXING



GALLERY PRINTS T-SHIRTS

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 16, 2021

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)

5 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 39-1-1 (29 KOs)

6 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)

7 **YESICA BOPP**
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)

8 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
Argentina • 29-3-3 (10 KOs)

9 **MARCELA ACUNA**
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)

10 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **ALICIA NAPOLEON ESPINOSA**
U.S. • 12-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)
5 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHT
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
2 **TORI NELSON**
U.S. • 20-2-3 (4 KOs)
3 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **TAYLA HARRIS**
Australia • 7-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CLARESSA SHIELDS** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
2 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE** IBF
Canada • 17-0-0 (0 KOs)
3 **HANNA GABRIELS** WBA
Costa Rica • 20-2-1 (11 KOs)
4 **MIKAELA LAUREN**
Sweden • 32-6-0 (13 KOs)
5 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JESSICA MCCASKILL** IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)
2 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
4 **ORNELLA DOMINI**
Switzerland • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 20-6-0 (0 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA LINARDATOU** WBO
Greece • 13-2-0 (6 KOs)
2 **MARY MCGEE** IBF
U.S. • 27-3-0 (15 KOs)
3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** WBC
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-4-0 (10 KOs)
5 **KALI REIS** WBA
U.S. • 17-7-1 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)
2 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 8-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)
5 **NICOLE WESNER**
Germany • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **TERRI HARPER** WBC
U.K. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)
2 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE** IBF
France • 22-1-0 (18 KOs)
3 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 17-0-1 (4 KOs)
5 **EWA BRODNICKA**
Poland • 19-1-0 (2 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBO
Puerto Rico • 39-1-1 (29 KOs)
2 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH** WBA, WBC
Canada • 41-10-2 (19 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **HEATHER HARDY**
U.S. • 22-1-0 (4 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN** IBF
U.S. • 18-3-1 (1 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MARCELA ACUNA** IBF
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)
2 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 36-4-4 (16 KOs)
3 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 29-3-3 (10 KOs)
4 **MAYERLIN RIVAS** WBA
Venezuela • 16-4-2 (10 KOs)
5 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 52-3-2 (30 KOs)
2 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 15-4-1 (0 KOs)
3 **DEBORA DIONICIUS**
Argentina • 30-2-0 (6 KOs)
4 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 20-3-1 (3 KOs)
5 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 54-10-4 (18 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 31-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 30-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 23-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 **ESMERALDA MORENO**
Mexico • 35-12-2 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 18-2-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 28-3-2 (10 KOs)
3 **AVA KNIGHT**
U.S. • 19-2-5 (5 KOs)
4 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 8-1-0 (1 KOs)
5 **IBETH ZAMORA** WBC
Mexico • 32-6-0 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **YESICA BOPP** WBA
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)
2 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **TSUNAMI TENKAI** WBO
Japan • 27-12-1 (16 KOs)
4 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 13-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
Mexico • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 10-0-1 (3 KOs)
2 **ANABEL ORTIZ** WBA
Mexico • 31-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 20-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ETSUKO TADA**
Japan • 20-3-3 (7 KOs)
5 **KATIA GUTIERREZ**
Mexico • 23-7-0 (6 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 15-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **SAEMI HANAGATA** IBF
Japan • 16-7-4 (7 KOs)
3 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 16-0-1 (5 KOs)
4 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
5 **NAO IKEYAMA**
Japan • 18-6-4 (5 KOs)

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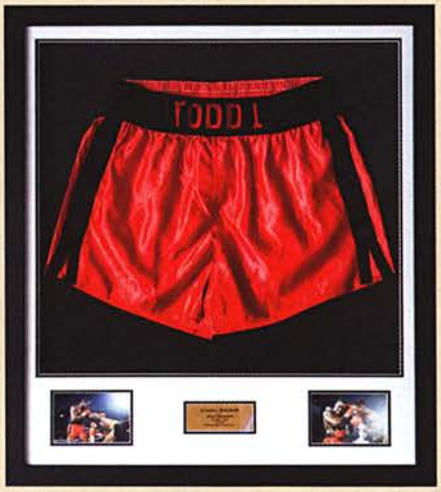
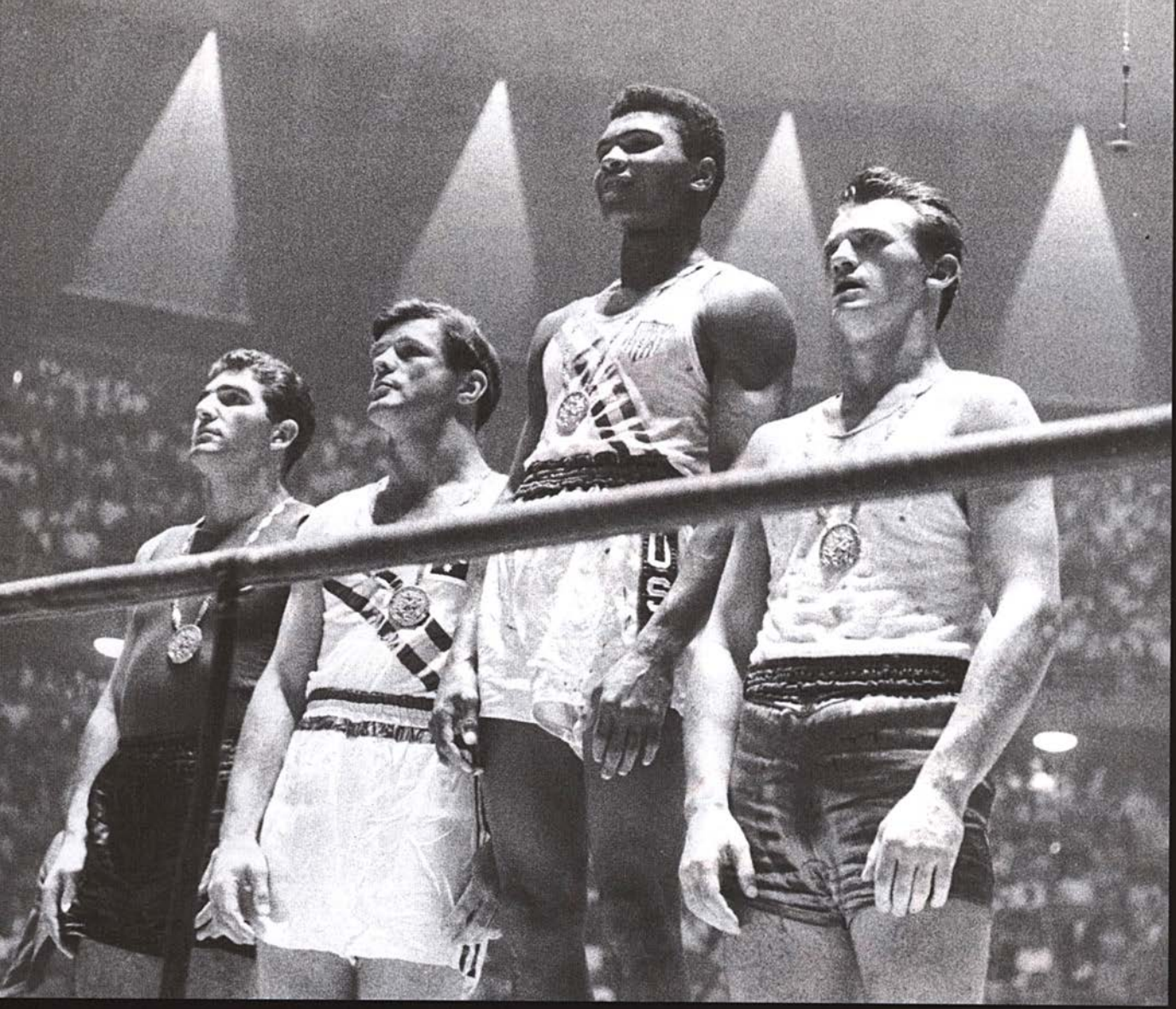




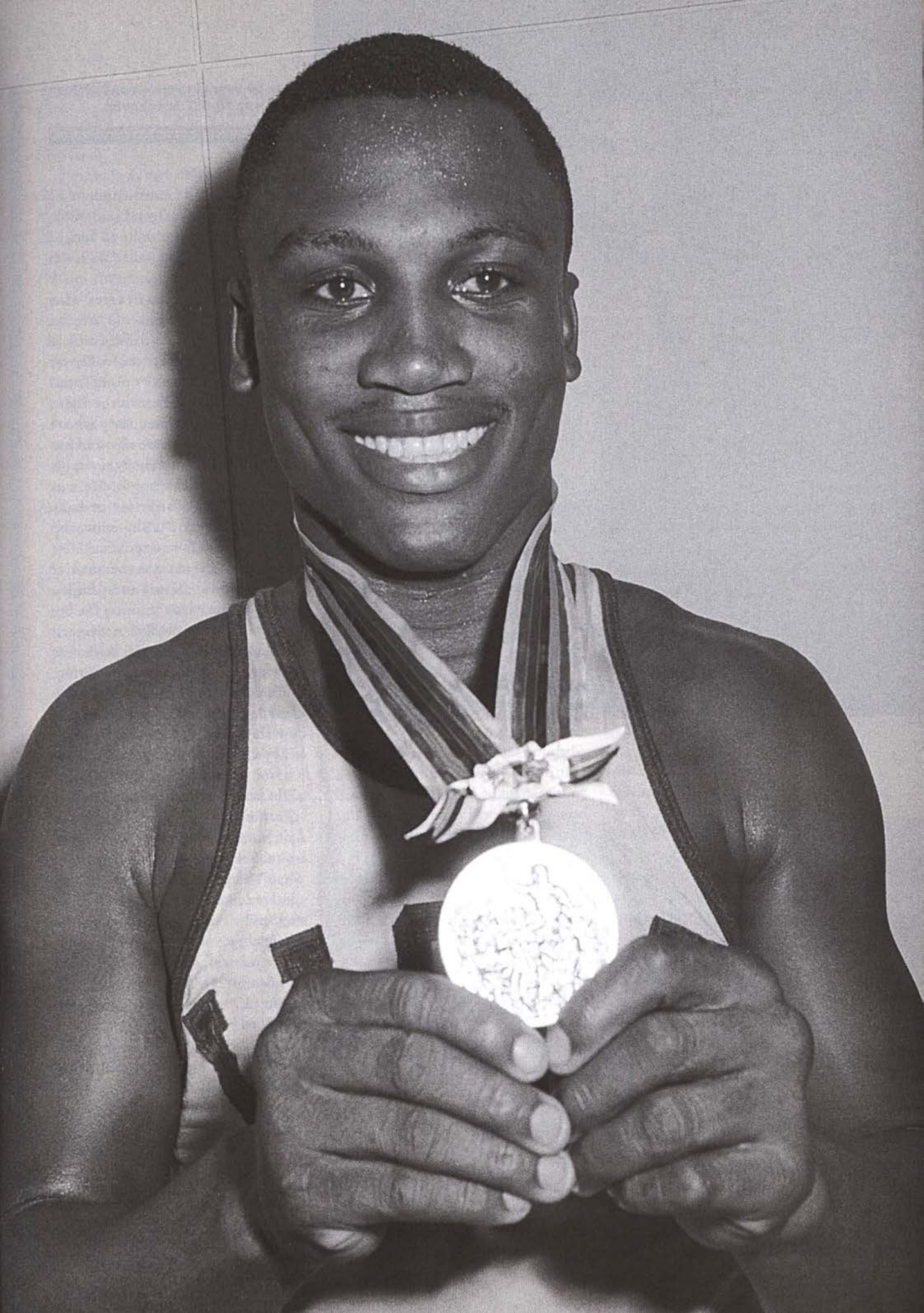
PAVED WITH GOLD

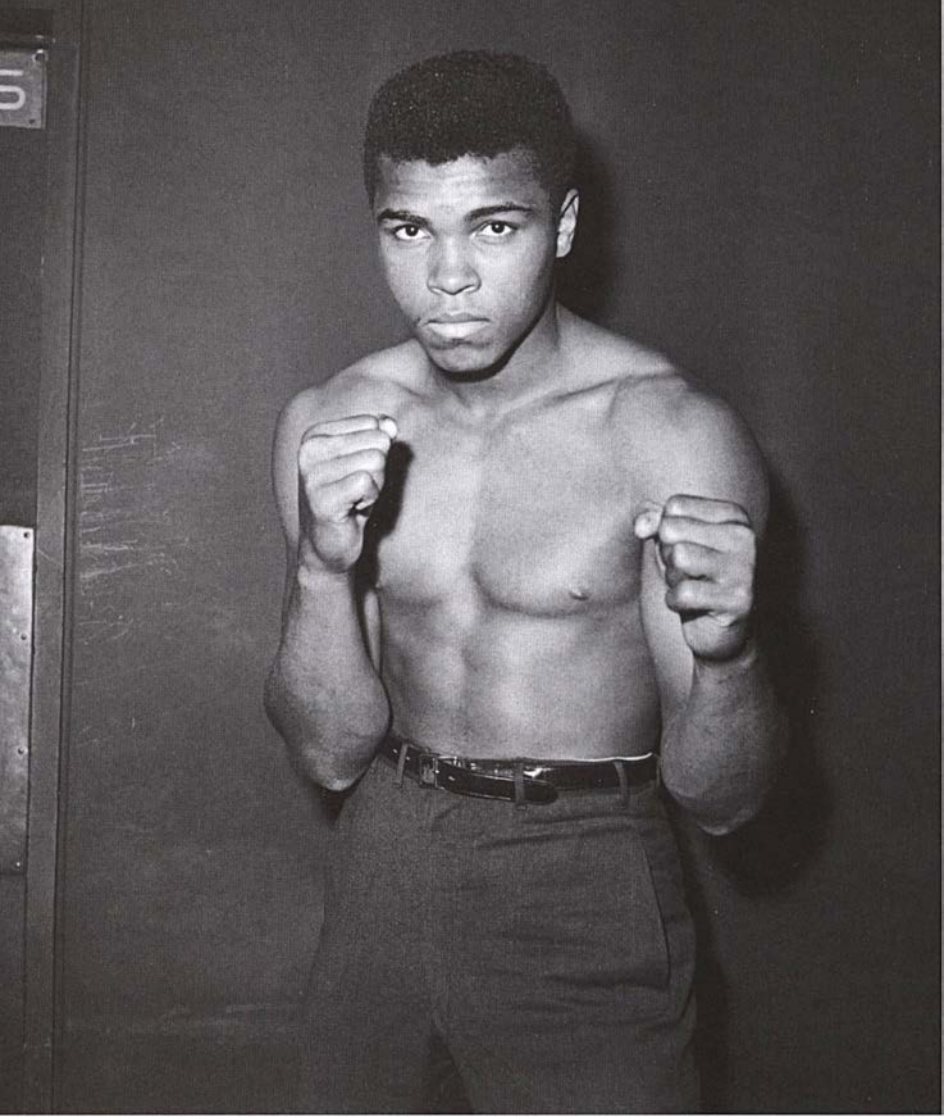
LONG BEFORE THEY MET AT THE CROSSROADS IN 1971, ALI AND FRAZIER STARTED THEIR PRO JOURNEYS AS OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS

By **Donald McRae**

"If someone had told me back then that Cassius Clay would become the most famous person in the world, I never would have believed them," Skeeter McClure said as he remembered how he had been Muhammad Ali's roommate at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. "It just didn't seem possible." McClure, who died in 2020, won Olympic gold for the U.S. as a light middleweight. Thirty years later, when he was a psychotherapist and business executive, he shared memories of his old teammate in Thomas Hauser's magisterial *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*.

Cassius Clay, as Ali was known then, was already a big talker who became the Olympic light heavyweight champion in Rome. But McClure was struck most by the 18-year-old Clay's shyness when not proclaiming his own extraordinary ability as a boxer. He was amused that, at an amateur tournament in Chicago, Clay "kept bugging everybody on the team, saying, 'Man, there are all these pretty girls walking around. We got to meet some of these girls.'... Then we went into the cafeteria, which was filled with more pretty girls. And the guy who had been agitating just sat there, staring at the food on his tray the whole time. He didn't say a word. We teased him about it for days, and all he did was look at us





This 19-year old version of Cassius Clay was 10-0 (7 knockouts).

Joe Frazier was another shy young man. Even after he equaled Clay's achievement by becoming an Olympic gold medalist in October 1964, Frazier remained reserved. Mark Kram Jr., who wrote the definitive biography of Smokin' Joe, describes Frazier's return from Olympic glory: "Only 20, he carried himself in public with an agreeable humility that Stan Hochman characterized in the Philadelphia Daily News as 'doorman-like politeness.'" The idea that Frazier might become inextricably linked to the most exalted athlete in the history of sports would have also seemed absurd then.

Yet, six-and-a-half years later, Ali and Frazier would meet for the first time in the Fight of the Century at Madison Square Garden. They were both unbeaten Olympic champions who had traveled very different roads to reach that tumultuous point. The political, personal and boxing pathways followed by each man have been documented exhaustively – but their respective Olympic journeys are less familiar.

Their Olympic experiences contain the foundations of their boxing lives as well as the similarities and contrasts that define their unique rivalry. Yet both Ali and Frazier came close to missing out on the Olympics completely.

By 1960, Clay had fought 108 amateur bouts while winning six Kentucky Golden Gloves titles, two national Golden Gloves tournaments and two National AAU championships. His boxing credentials were excellent, but his shyness outside the ring was matched by a terror of flying. "We had a rough flight going to California for the [Olympic] trials," recalled Joe Martin, his amateur trainer. "So when it was time to go to Rome, he said he wasn't gonna fly and that he wouldn't go. I said, 'Well, you'll lose the opportunity of being a great fighter,' and he said, 'Well, I'm not gonna go.'"

Four years later, Frazier also seemed fated to miss out on the Olympics. He was devastated to lose a controversial decision to Buster Mathis in the heavyweight final of the U.S. trials. Before the fight, Mathis was considered the favorite because of his extreme size and the fact he was deceptively light on his feet and had quick hands. He was a little like a 1960s version of Andy Ruiz Jr., another chubby man who dismantled an Olympic gold medalist in Anthony Joshua in the summer of 2019, but Mathis was even larger. Before he went into training for the trials, the 6-foot-3 Mathis weighed 340 pounds and Robert H. Boyle was scathing in Sports Illustrated: "Sitting in his corner, he looks like a melting chocolate sundae." But few boxing experts believed a relatively small heavyweight such as the 5-foot-10 Frazier, who weighed 196 pounds, could keep the gigantic Mathis at bay.

Frazier believed in himself. He also sent Mathis a warning in the trials by knocking out the AAU champion, Wyce Westbrook. Clay Hodges was another crumpled victim after he was stopped by Frazier in Round 2 of the semifinals.

Frazier was convinced he could beat Mathis. "My only problem," he predicted, "will be getting out of the way when he falls."

The heavyweight final of the 1964 Olympic trials was a complicated affair. Mathis had been troubled so badly by high blood pressure, caused by his excessive weight, that doctors instructed him to lie down all afternoon before they allowed him to fight. His slumbering rest seemed to help, for once the opening bell rang, Frazier's brutal punching did not seem to bother Mathis much. The big man

glided away from most of the punches with surprising alacrity, and even when Frazier landed, Mathis seemed unfazed.

Frazier was not helped when two points were deducted for low blows, but most reporters were certain he had done more than enough to clinch his place on the Olympic team. When the decision was announced in favor of Mathis, Dave Anderson wrote: "They seemed to be dazzled by his ballet, instead of his punches. I wondered if we were watching the same fight."

The result seemed so wrong that Frazier promised to quit boxing. He would go back to Philly and forget all about the Olympics and the pro game. In Kram's book, a touching scene is described. "Frazier spotted Philadelphia Bulletin boxing writer Jack Friend, who had been attentive to his amateur career. Joe shook hands with him and said: 'Thanks, Jack, for all you did for me.' Anderson remembered thinking: 'This is a guy with some heart.'"

Four years earlier, Clay had also displayed his heart in the final of his Olympic light heavyweight trial. After easy victories in the earlier rounds, he faced an imposing rival in Allen "Junebug" Hudson, a former soldier who had knocked out his semifinal opponent in 32 seconds. Clay might have been shy and scared of flying after his bumpy arrival in San Francisco for the nearby trials, but he knew he could whip every amateur fighter he faced. He won the first two rounds in the final, moving with the slick fluidity that would define his greatest years in the ring, before a left hook dropped him.

But the resilience that would also distinguish Ali when he became a world champion was already obvious. The Louisville teenager got up immediately with gritty defiance. Clay danced out of the way of some wild punches before, with clinical authority, nailing Hudson with a heavy right hand. Another followed, and Hudson went down. He could not match the toughness of Clay and, on jittery legs, Hudson was rescued by the referee.

Cassius Clay had won the right to fight in the Rome Olympics. The drama, however, had just begun. After Clay failed to persuade Martin to loan him the money to catch a train back to Louisville, rather than take the return flight, his anxiety deepened. He sold the gold watch he had won in San Francisco and used the cash for a rail ticket back to Kentucky.

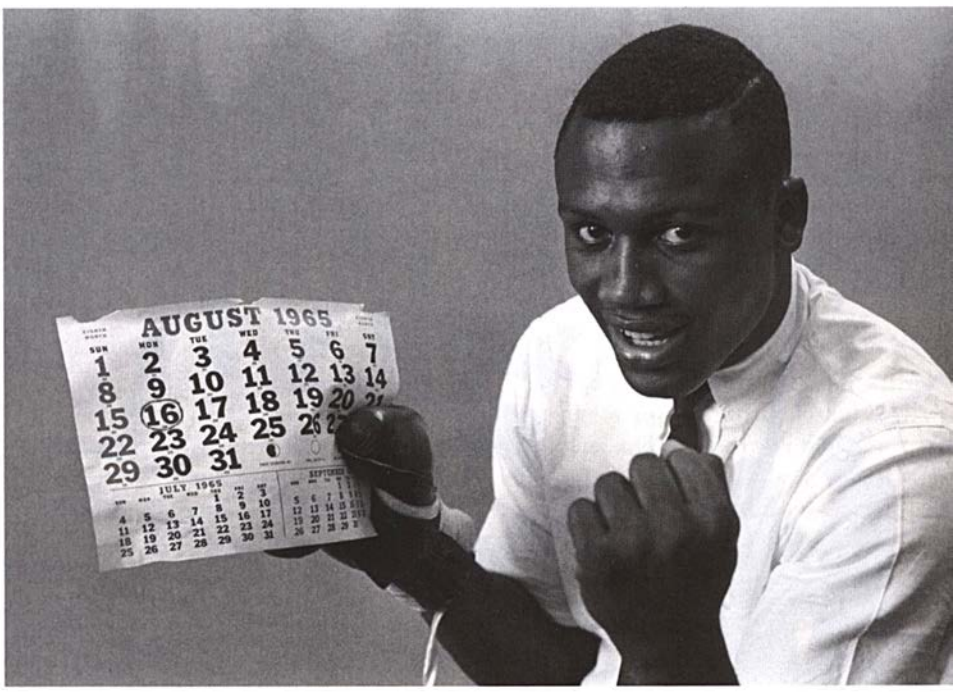
His long train journey home hardened his resolve, and he made his impassioned speech to Martin about not flying to Rome. Martin told Hauser it took almost three hours for him to calm down Clay in Central Park in Louisville. "I convinced him that if he wanted to be heavyweight champion of the world, he had to go to Rome and win the Olympics."

Frazier, in contrast, was despondent four years later when it seemed as if his chances of fighting at the Tokyo Olympics had been ruined. He was also near destitute, and when he was asked to travel to San Francisco as a substitute covering the heavyweight and light heavyweight selections, Frazier did not think he could afford it. He worried about losing his low-paid job as a butcher in Philadelphia, and even when reassured that he would not be fired, Frazier struggled to pay for his trip.

Three weeks before the start of the Tokyo Olympics, Frazier and Mathis fought an exhibition bout at an Air Force base. It followed the same pattern as their fight in the Olympic trials. Frazier landed the meaningful punches, but Mathis was awarded a contentious decision. But the fighting gods had seen enough. Mathis had broken a knuckle on his right hand and would not be able to fight in the Olympics.

When Frazier took the call asking him to step in as Mathis' replacement, he cried out: "Oh, God! Thank you, God!"

Four years earlier, Clay survived the flight to Rome. He distracted himself by chatting incessantly to his teammates. The American press corps was downbeat about any gold medal prospects for their boxers. Such pessimism did not affect Clay, who predicted that both he and his old pal Skeeter McClure were certain to win gold. His wide-eyed enthusiasm and garrulous nature blossomed once he was in Rome. He was described by a reporter as being "as friendly and frisky as a puppy" as he used his



A 21-year-old Joe Frazier marks the date of his pro debut.

BETTMANN

small camera to take photographs of his first visit abroad. "Took 48 pictures today," he told the reporter before handing over his camera so that he could join a group shot with a bemused group of fellow tourists.

Clay's shyness also faded as he flirted with Wilma Rudolph, the great American sprinter who would win three gold medals in Rome, and gazed longingly at other beautiful young female athletes from around the world. His outrageous charisma was already obvious, and even the stars gravitated towards Clay. He met Bing Crosby in Rome, and he and the old crooner strutted arm-in-arm for the cameras. Floyd Patterson, an even shier man who had regained his world heavyweight title a few months earlier, was introduced to Clay. He was still only an amateur, but Clay pointed out that he was taller and had a longer reach than the world champion. "Be seeing you in about two more years," Clay warned Patterson.

McClure saw the drive in him. "In Rome, he was outgoing," McClure said of Clay, "but he was seriously into boxing. I don't know of anybody on any team who took it more seriously than he did."

Clay knew he was fighting in a fiercely competitive division. There were many medal contenders, but Zbigniew Pietrzykowski was the overwhelming favorite. The Pole had been European champion on three occasions and won bronze at the 1956 Olympics (at light middleweight) in Melbourne. He was 25, in his prime, and had fought over 200 bouts. Clay claimed to be unimpressed – describing Pietrzykowski as "some guy with 15 letters in his name."

The tournament began well for Clay. He knocked out Yvon Becot from Belgium and dazzled and pummeled Gennadiy Shatkov, a Russian who had won Olympic gold in Melbourne four years before as a middleweight. The semifinal was more testing, but Clay was still far too skilled for Tony Madigan, a rugged Australian. The teenager from Louisville was in the Olympic final against the experienced Pietrzykowski.

Clay was more circumspect in the opening two rounds against the Pole, who fought out of an awkward southpaw stance. The American looked to have shaded them, but a big last round for Pietrzykowski could've still tilted the balance. Clay shut down any doubts with an imperious flurry of punches that made blood spurt from Pietrzykowski's nose and mouth. His shimmering brilliance had transformed a hardened European champion into a hapless amateur who, as William Nack wrote later in Sports Illustrated, suddenly resembled "a portly coffeehouse keeper from Poland." Pietrzykowski's vest was covered in blood, which also turned Clay's white trunks a pale shade of pink. The final bell offered merciful relief to Pietrzykowski.

An Olympic gold medal was soon draped around Clay's neck. It was the first real token of the glory and the adulation that would define the world's reaction to Ali in later decades. Of course, in changing his name while embracing the Nation of Islam doctrine and standing up to racism in America, Ali would also face resentment, anger and a three-and-a-half-year ban from boxing before he fought Frazier in March 1971.

His great rival also encountered adversity and misunderstanding. Frazier was only two years older than Clay had been in Rome, but he was a more mature man who understood his responsibilities. Every day in Tokyo, he wrote to his wife, Florence, telling her how much he loved her and their three children and that he would win the gold medal.

After a first-round stoppage win over Uganda's George Oywello, Frazier was dropped by Athol McQueen, the Australian, early in their quarterfinal. It

Clay came of age in his TKO 7 win over Sonny Liston in Miami Beach.

Frazier would earn partial recognition as champ at the expense of Buster Mathis.

was the first time Frazier had been knocked down, and he responded with characteristic fire. He dominated the rest of the fight and stopped McQueen in the final round. Frazier was also staggered early in his semifinal by Vadim Yemelyanov, but he again responded magnificently to stop the Russian and secure his place in the final.

The real toughness of Smokin' Joe only emerged later. He had broken his left thumb against Yemelyanov, but he refused an x-ray because he was worried he would be forced to withdraw from the final against the German Hans Huber. Even with a busted hand, the gulf between the two fighters was vast, and the only surprise was that two of the judges chose Huber as the winner. But three judges correctly identified Joe Frazier as the Olympic heavyweight champion.

Unlike Clay, who was soon contracted to a Louisville consortium, Frazier did not receive any immediate offers to turn pro. Kram stresses that Frazier's prospects appeared limited and he "found himself in a state of limbo." Whereas 10 of the 11 white men in the Louisville Sponsoring Group were millionaires or members of extremely wealthy Kentucky families, it was different for Frazier. He was broke and jobless after he could not return to work at the butchery in Philadelphia. Instead, he had to endure two operations on his fractured thumb.

Frazier was worried, but he retained his sense of decency. Kram writes that, four days before Christmas in 1964, Frazier spoke for an hour to eighth-grade students. Their teacher, W.P. Moran, wrote an appreciative letter to the Philadelphia Inquirer: "He was delightful. The children loved him. He was good for them. ... There should be more Joe Fraziers in the world."

There could be only one Muhammad Ali. Earlier that year, in February 1964, he had shocked the world by knocking out the fearsome Sonny Liston to become heavyweight champion of the world. His Olympic achievements had set him on this path but, as so often happened with Ali, a myth eventually enveloped his gold medal. It was claimed wrongly in his 1975 autobiography that, in protest against America's racism, he had flung his Olympic medal in the river soon after his return home. The truth was more prosaic. He was seen holding his medal as late as 1963, and Ali admitted at a press conference after the book was published that he had merely lost the medal. The heavyweight champion of the world did not need a shiny piece of metal to remind him that his path to boxing glory had begun in Rome.

Joe Frazier would not be denied either. But he was forced to take a longer and harder road. In 1965, Frazier made a living by lugging crates in and out of a removal van. It was not work befitting the Olympic heavyweight champion. He was desperate for promotional backing but, without it, Frazier made his pro debut at the Convention Hall in Philadelphia against Woody Goss in August 1965. After 102 seconds, referee Zack Clayton stopped the fight because, in his words, he wanted "to keep Goss from getting killed."

Frazier's first four fights were all won easily but, by the end of 1965, 14 months after he had won gold in Tokyo, he was still without any backing. It took Billy Gray, a pastor who had given Frazier additional work as a janitor at his church, to galvanize a consortium of white business leaders in Philadelphia to set up a group called Cloverlay. Influenced by the success of Ali's Louisville Sponsoring Group, the more modestly funded Cloverlay consisted of 40 investors who paid $250 each for an initial 80 shares in the backing of Joe Frazier. The fighter himself called it "a swell deal" because it guaranteed him a weekly salary of $100 and 55 percent of each purse, rising to 60 percent if he and the Cloverlay group extended their option.

Frazier made his debut as a Cloverlay fighter on January 17, 1966. He felt like a proper professional fighter at last and, full of fresh hope, he knocked out Mel Turnbow in the first round. Smokin' Joe, with a 5-0 record, was on the rise. He fixed his gaze on a fellow Olympic champion.

Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, the kings of Rome and Tokyo, were on a collision course to immortality. RING

MORE THAN JUST TWO MEN VYING FOR THE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP, THE FIRST **ALI-FRAZIER** FIGHT WAS AN AMERICAN CULTURE CLASH

By **Michael Rosenthal**

OPPOSITES ATTACK

The first fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier – the March 8, 1971, Fight of the Century – would've been a huge event even if it were viewed strictly from a sporting perspective.

Ali, returning from 3½ years in exile, and Frazier both were undefeated and had legitimate claims on the heavyweight championship at a time when it was still the most important prize in sports. It might've been the biggest fight since the great Joe Louis was at his peak in the 1930s and '40s.

But that was only part of the story, arguably an incidental part. Ali-Frazier I took place at a time of upheaval in the United States. African Americans were fighting for their rights and the war in Vietnam raged, dividing the country into Black vs. White and anti-war protesters vs. those who supported it.

The fighters took the political divide into the ring with them at Madison Square Garden in New York – Ali on one side of the divide, an unwitting Frazier on the other – in what became an epic battle of competing ideologies.

Journalist Bryant Gumbel, interviewed for the 2000 documentary *Ali-Frazier I: One Nation … Divisible*, captured the essence of the event.

"It was the greatest sports event of the 20th century," he said. "Two undefeated champions against a backdrop unique in history."

To understand the significance of the fight, we must go back a few years before it took place.

Ali entered the American consciousness in 1960, when – as Cassius Clay – he won a gold medal in the light heavyweight division at the Rome Olympics. He turned pro later that year and quickly developed a reputation as both an unusual fighter

PHOTOS BY JOHN SHEARER

and character. He had the biggest personality in American sports history, his only rival being Babe Ruth.

In 1964, heavyweight champion Sonny Liston was ready to fight the motor-mouthed upstart, the "Louisville Lip," a nickname that preceded the moniker "The Greatest." Few gave Clay a chance to beat the imposing titleholder, but his antics in the lead-up to the fight – outbursts that were both bizarre and amusing – generated fascination.

And, in a great upset, he won the fight, forcing an overmatched Liston to quit after six rounds. Clay hadn't exactly become a hero, but he certainly "shook up the world."

Then everything changed.

The month after the fight, Ali, a new member of the separatist Nation of Islam, announced that he was now a Muslim and had changed his name to Muhammad Ali. He was no longer a zany but harmless boxer. He was an unapologetic militant who advocated for separation of the races.

Three years later, on April 28, 1967, he became a symbol of the growing anti-war movement when he refused induction into the U.S. Army on religious grounds. He lost his championship, was banned from the sport, faced the possibility of prison time and had earned the enmity of millions.

The White establishment suddenly reviled him. Most African Americans and liberal Whites – many of them "hippies" who saw evil in the foreign war – embraced him.

"The country was just split completely," Jerry Izenberg, who covered many of the events leading up to the fight, told The Ring recently. "Part of it was Ali's comment about not being mad at the Vietcong. That was a major factor, because everyone had an opinion on it.

"Then it just built to a crescendo. It became very emotional."

Ali's exile was difficult for him. The boxing world had cut off his livelihood, forcing him to charge for interviews – which he had never done – and speak on college campuses to make ends meet. Things got so bad at one point that he agreed to spar with heavyweight contender Joe Bugner for $1,000 and tried to sell him a primitive portable phone he had somehow acquired for another $1,200, according to the book *Bouts of Mania* by Richard Hoffer.

"Joe," he said, "it's just what you need." Bugner didn't buy.

Enter Joe Frazier.

"Smokin' Joe," whose nickname perfectly described his boxing style, ascended the heavyweight hierarchy while Ali sat idly. The son of poor sharecroppers from South Carolina but a resident of Philadelphia since age 15, Frazier had followed in Ali's footsteps by winning his own gold medal in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics – in the heavyweight division – even though he fought with a broken thumb.

Frazier had to wait before he could turn pro because of the injury, but he finally made his debut in August 1965. He reeled off one knockout after another – relying heavily on what would become an iconic left hook – to build a reputation as a legitimate challenger to the heavyweight championship, which was vacant as a result of Ali's actions.

To fill the void, the World Boxing Association organized a tournament of contenders. Frazier was initially among the eight participants, but he pulled out to face the hulking Buster Mathis for the New York State Athletic Commission's version of the heavyweight title on March 4, 1968, shortly before the tournament final.

Frazier knocked out Mathis in the 11th round to win the New York title and run his record to 20-0 (18 KOs). Then, less than two years later, he did the same to tournament winner Jimmy Ellis in four rounds to gain further recognition as heavyweight champion and take another step closer to meeting the man who would become his greatest rival, one whose name seemed to be on everyone's tongue.

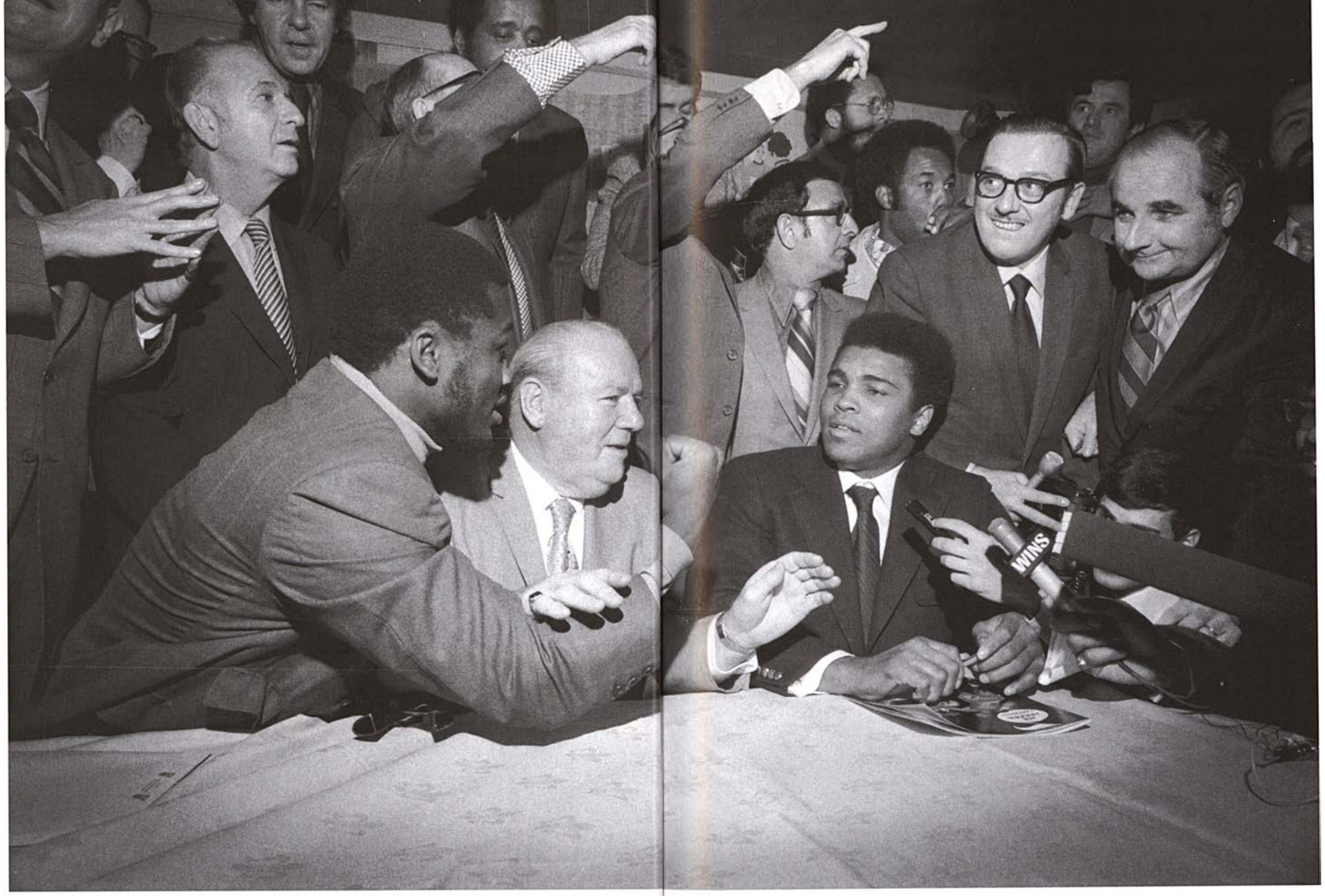
"[Frazier] had a lot of animosity because he had become great, well-known, and everyone kept saying, 'But you haven't fought Muhammad Ali,'" George Foreman said.

Ali was still struggling financially when the public began to clamor for a showdown with Frazier to determine the genuine heavyweight champ. And, of course, Ali desperately wanted to make the fight.

Who was among those he went to in hopes of regaining a license? Frazier himself.

"He called [me and] said, 'Hey man, I want my license. What can we do?' I said, 'I'll see what I can do to help you get your license,'" Frazier said in the documentary.

Frazier did more than that. Yes, he pulled whatever strings he could to get Ali back into the ring, although it's not clear what role, if any, that played in Ali's return. He also helped Ali on his bottom line on more than one occasion.



The Frazier-Ali bout is made official on December 30, 1970.

Butch Lewis, a member of Frazier's team, told the story of the time he and Frazier pulled up in his limo in front of a hotel in New York at which Ali was staying. Bundini Brown, Ali's sidekick, saw them and approached. He said Ali was having problems paying the hotel bill. Ali got into the car, they drove off and, as Frazier put it, "I put some love into his hand, some money."

Ali then got out of the car and, like he was given a cue from a director, he began to bellow in the street. "All right, Frazier! Out of the car, now! I want you now! Joe Frazier got my championship! I want to fight Joe Frazier!"

"And Joe's going, 'What's wrong with this guy?'" Lewis said.

Frazier would ask that question many more times going forward.

Ali was granted a license in August 1970 by something called the City of Atlanta Athletic Commission, which reportedly was set up specifically for the purpose of having Ali fight there on October 26 while his battle against the United States government was under appeal.

His first opponent was capable contender Jerry Quarry, who took a beating from the much-quicker Ali before the fight was stopped after three rounds because of a cut. Six weeks later, Ali stopped Oscar Bonavena in the 15th round at Madison Square Garden in New York, which had been forced by a judge to reinstate Ali.

Ali thus became the top contender for Frazier's title. And the wheels that would lead to the showdown began to turn.

Madison Square Garden and the Astrodome in Houston both offered each boxer $1.25 million to stage the fight. But Herbert Muhammad, who handled Ali, and Yank Durham, Frazier's trainer and manager, knew

they could get more and turned to high-powered Hollywood agent Jerry Perenchio.

Perenchio agreed to pay each fighter a record $2.5 million; he got Jack Kent Cooke, the owner of the Lakers, Kings and The Forum in Los Angeles, to provide $4.5 million in financial backing and received the rest from Madison Square Garden, which would charge an unheard-of $150 for ringside seats.

"I never promoted a fight before," Perenchio said. "It sounded like a hell of an idea. And I thought it transcended boxing because it had to do with the Vietnam War, religion, being Black in America, all of that.

"... I had just one problem: I didn't have $5 million. And the 77th man I talked to was Jack Kent Cooke."

The fight was on. So was the name-calling.

Ali took every chance he had to belittle Frazier – at press conferences, on television, at any and all public events. The crudest remarks focused on his appearance and intelligence. "His nose is flat. He's ugly. He can't talk," said Ali, who repeated similar insults throughout the buildup to the fight.

That was nothing compared with his most cutting comments, which questioned Frazier's loyalty to his own people. Ali called his opponent "Uncle Tom."

Frazier had, in fact, come to represent those who were angry at Ali – the aforementioned White establishment – but that wasn't his choice. He wasn't a political creature, as Ali was. He was a boxer with a wife and kids. His concern was putting food on the table, not changing the world. And Ali evidently resented him for that.

Joe's son Marvis (and presumably his siblings) suffered as a result of Ali's words. He was only 10 at the time of the fight.

"I would get in all kinds of trouble in school," he said. "The majority of kids said, 'Ali is going to whip your dad. Your dad can't fight.' I said, 'Why are you saying that?' 'Cause he's a Tom.' 'What? My dad's no Tom.' In the Black community, those are harsh words.

"... I believe what hurt my dad is he gave heart and soul to help another brother. And that brother comes and then, like a knife, cuts him."

Frazier was hurt. And he never understood the logic of Ali's stream of insults. Ali would later say that he was only trying to sell the fight, which one could argue makes no sense. Every venue was sold-out or nearly so. And they were both guaranteed $2.5 million. That was set in stone.

Frazier got under Ali's skin at least once, calling him Cassius Clay

Some people were disdainful of how the fight was made.

on national television, but that was nothing compared to the abuse he received.

"Why is this guy doing this?" Frazier said years later. "Why does he have to say these things about me? I'm an Uncle Tom, I'm the White man's champion. That wasn't what it's all about. It's about being champion of the world, representing everybody."

Izenberg, who wrote about the fight in his book *Once There Were Giants:*

The Golden Age of Heavyweight Boxing, knows why Ali said those things. He was being Ali. "He was just running his mouth," Izenberg said. "He never knew when to stop."

Frazier never forgot the insults, which he endured before all three of his fights with Ali. They reportedly became friendly many years later, but Frazier held a grudge.

I interviewed him about 30 years after the first fight for an article in the Los Angeles Daily News. Ali's declining health at that time – primarily his Parkinson's disease, which was slowly killing him – came up. Frazier, who had seemed distracted, raised his head and looked me straight in the eyes.

"How do you think he got that way? It was me," he said, as if he took pride in damaging his rival. That's how hurt he was.

Ali was getting under Frazier's skin long before the opening bell.

The confluence of sport, Ali's personality and politics seemed to have whipped everyone into a frenzy by the time fight night arrived.

That included many celebrities, who flocked to an event at which it was as important to be seen as it was to see. Actor Burt Lancaster, a friend of Perenchio's, was on the broadcast team. A James Taylor concert was scheduled to take place at MSG that night, but the singer was paid off with 15 pairs of tickets and a new date. And Frank Sinatra was hired by Life magazine to be a ringside photographer.

The Madison Square Garden schedule didn't include ticket prices, because it sold out so quickly. One Garden executive said, "We could've sold out 10 Madison Square Gardens." And no seats could be found at most closed-circuit outlets, which charged as much as $30 for a ticket.

More than 2,000 journalists from around the world submitted requests for 600 credentials, making it clear that Ali-Frazier I was an international phenomenon.

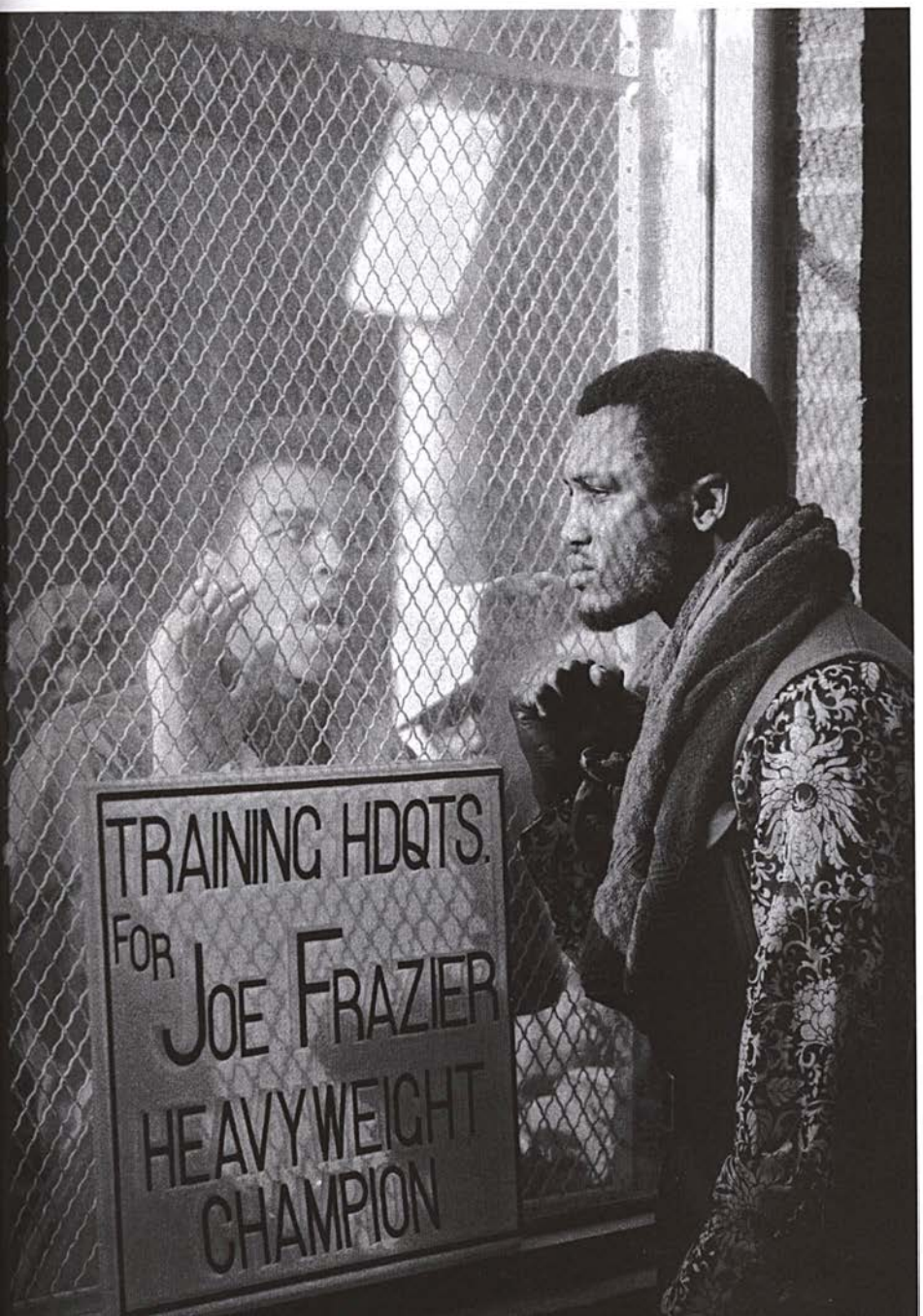
And 300 million people would have the opportunity to watch the fight on TV or in theaters – two million in the United States and Canada, and 298 million in the rest of the world. That was more than 8 percent of the entire population on Earth at the time.

For Frazier, the fight was an opportunity to prove once and for all that he was the best heavyweight in the world and avenge Ali's cruel taunts. He seethed.

For Ali, it was a chance to regain the title he and many others believed was unjustly stolen from him as a result of his political stance. Just as important, he thought it might be his final payday. The Supreme Court of the United States wouldn't rule on his case until June. He thought he was going to prison, although he would be vindicated in the end.

For the fans, even those at odds with each other over their ideologies, it was an opportunity to see two of the greatest heavyweights who ever lived do battle in a highly charged environment.

There has been nothing like it before or since.



THE RING WITHDRAWS RECOGNITION OF CLAY AS HEAVYWEIGHT KING

By **Dan Daniel**

Frazier was the champion, but he still needed to beat Ali to silence the doubters.

This feature originally appeared in the May 1970 issue of The Ring Magazine.

Editor's note: The following reprinted article contains language, including referring to Muhammad Ali as Cassius Clay years after he legally changed his name, that could be construed as offensive. In the interest of historical integrity, we did not remove the author's original words from the story. We present this archival material as it was originally published (including the title of the article), in part, to document the issues and social context of the times, which include the attitudes and opinions of the people who covered the fights and events.

The RING

THE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION— CLAY OR FRAZIER???

The Ring Magazine has withdrawn its support from Cassius Clay as the heavyweight champion of the world and has accepted Joe Frazier, of Philadelphia, as Clay's legal and indisputable successor to the title.

On the night of February 16, Frazier defeated Jimmy Ellis, of Louisville, Ky., and eliminated him as the only contender for the universal championship.

As a result, our readers will find the heavyweight ratings in this issue of The Ring headed by Frazier, all alone.

In deciding to withdraw its backing of Clay as the continuing holder of the title which he won by knocking out Sonny Liston at Miami Beach on the night of February 25, 1964, in seven rounds, The Ring was prompted by Cassius himself.

Since 1968, with Clay inactive and adjudged guilty of a felony for refusing to accept the draft call, The Ring had refused to take the title from him unless he were found guilty of the felony by the Supreme Court of the United States and forced to enter a Federal penitentiary for a period of five years with the additional punishment of a fine of $10,000. As ruled by the Federal courts, these judgements were not eliminated by the Supreme Court's first review of the Clay case.

That review asked the Federal courts to ignore, in consideration of the felony charge, any evidence which the government might have obtained through wiretapping and bugging, and any other material picked up by clandestine methods.

Month after month, against the dissent of a considerable percentage of its readership all over the world, The Ring persisted in its stand that Cassius Clay was entitled to his day in court. The Ring held that he could not be deprived of the world championship unless the Supreme Court found him guilty of a felony, or Cassius Clay, of his free will and uncoerced determination, gave up the world championship and announced his retirement from boxing.

Month after month, Clay held to his defense that, as a lay preacher of the Black Muslim church, and as a conscientious objector, he could not be denied exemption from Selective Service.

In supporting Clay's right to hold the world title, The Ring did not back up his claims as a preacher and conscientious objector. But it did insist and persist that Cassius could not be shorn of his championship unless his defense was utterly controverted and his points were denied by the courts.

Or, if supported by the courts, he were to lose his title in the ring.

Last summer, Clay, making talks all over the country, said that he would fight no more.

He had gotten into difficulties with Elijah Muhammad,

the Black Muslim ruler. Cassius had been suspended by the Muslims for one year and he appeared to be upset thereover.

Disturbed by its standing up for the man who kept telling the public that he would fight no more in the arena, The Ring got in touch with him. The results of a telephone conversation with him at his home in Chicago were inconclusive. He said that he had not made up his mind. This appeared to kill his retirement statements.

Last December, Clay returned to his retirement stand. Later, he appeared in a Broadway stage production in which his limited skills were assessed as being superior to his vehicle. The play made a fast exit.

In February 1970, Cassius Clay's expressed determination not to appear in the ring again as a professional became more emphatic than ever. He said that he would present to the winner of the Frazier-Ellis fight the world championship belt which had been awarded to him by The Ring Magazine in 1964.

A few days before the Frazier-Ellis contest, Eddie Dooley, chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission, ruled that Clay would not be permitted to make the presentation in the Madison Square Garden ring. Cassius thereupon announced that he would ship the belt to his Louisville alma mater, Central High School.

Nat Fleischer, editor and publisher of The Ring, who had become friendly with Clay at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, where Cassius won the light heavyweight title, called a staff conference and asked for a determination of the Clay case.

It was the strong sentiment of the staff that Clay had given up the world championship of his free will and that The Ring had been released from its commitments on his behalf.

The Ring decision was made without a dissenting voice. It also was voted that the winner of the Frazier-Ellis fight could be recognized by this magazine as the new heavyweight champion of the world.

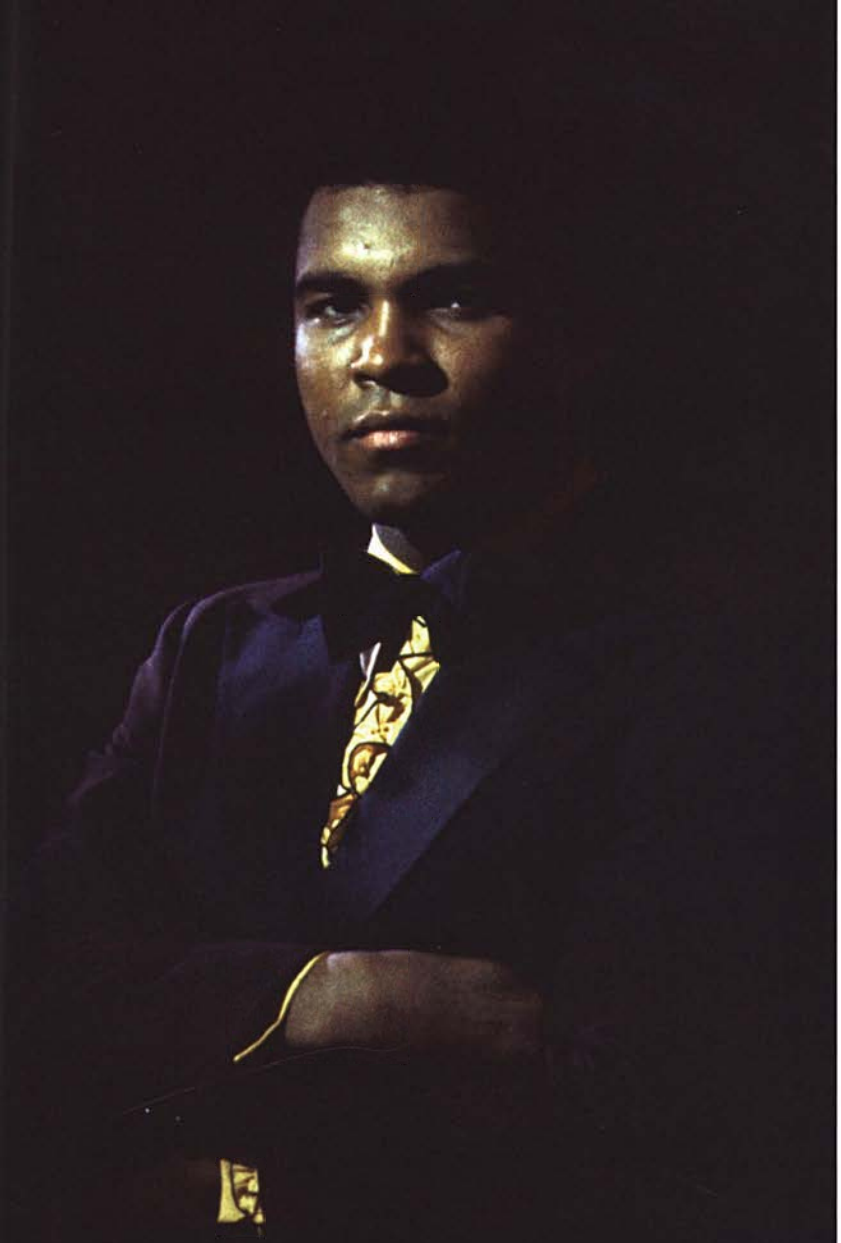
If, as many skeptics predict, Clay changes his mind about quitting the ring and the lush paydays which would become available to him if he were cleared by the Supreme Court, Cassius would have to appear as the challenger, and emphatically not as the champion.

His position would be similar to the one in which Jim Jeffries found himself on July 4, 1910, at Reno, Nev., where he challenged Jack Johnson, the titleholder, and was knocked out in 15 rounds.

Jeffries had retired in 1905 and announced that he was handing the title to the winner of a bout between Marvin Hart and Jack Root.

Hart beat Root, Tommy Burns beat Hart, and Johnson stopped Burns in 14 rounds on December 26, 1908, at Sydney, Australia.

The lucre lure got the better of Jeffries, and he went



Dressed to kill – Frazier and Ali pose for publicity shots ahead of The Fight of the Century.

THE RING MAGAZINE, MAY 1970.

after Johnson, who was far superior to the once mighty Boilermaker.

Johnson was beaten by Jess Willard, and then Jack Dempsey knocked out Big Jess.

Retiring unbeaten, Black Muslim Clay achieves a fistic distinction which hitherto had been gained by only two other heavyweight champions, Gene Tunney, in July 1928, after he had knocked out Tom Heeney, and Rocky Marciano, in April 1956, following his nine-round victory over Archie Moore.

If the Supreme Court finds the case against Clay indefensible by him and ships him off to jail, Cassius will find himself in a sorry plight shared by no other world heavyweight champion.

No other heavyweight champion has resisted an Army call to duty.

No other boxer ever placed himself on record as a conscientious objector.

No other professional boxer ever before asked the public to accept him as a preacher for a religious sect while he yet was competing.

No other professional fighter, still seeking to defend a world title, refused national service in a time of battle.

Tunney came out of the Marines. Max Schmeling doubtless had no option, but he did serve when called by Hitler's army.

Joe Louis enlisted and fought several times for service relief funds.

The Ring wishes to take the opportunity to thank those of its readers who dissented pleasantly from its policy in backing Cassius as the champion, against claims of Ellis, who won the WBA elimination tournament, and Frazier, whose title claims were supported by six states and some foreign countries. Dissenting readers never denied The Ring's rights to support Clay.

The position now adopted by The Ring will be acclaimed by the British Board of Boxing Control and many other governing bodies.

Elimination of Clay will clear up a heavyweight muddle which hurt all boxing throughout the world.

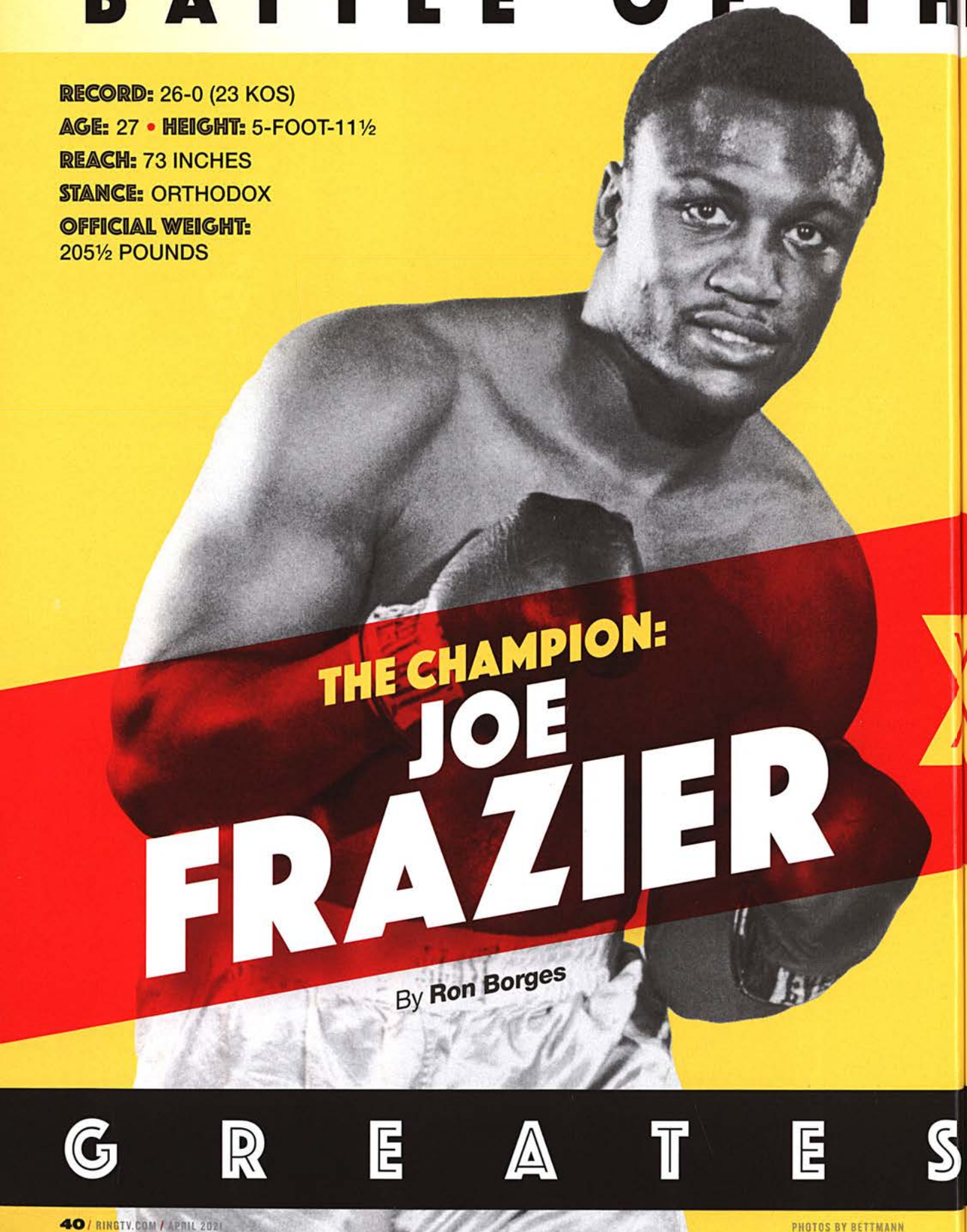
The Ring admitted the existence of this injury, but, nevertheless, fought for the right.

The Ring offers its congratulations to Frazier as the new champion, and its condolences to Ellis, who was a gentleman all the way.

Their campaigns toward the confrontation in New York were happily and pleasantly devoid of personalities, and that scurrilous vituperation which sometimes has entered into such situations. Boxing has grown up.

BATTLE OF THE CHAMPIONS

RECORD: 26-0 (23 KOS)
AGE: 27 • **HEIGHT:** 5-FOOT-11½
REACH: 73 INCHES
STANCE: ORTHODOX
OFFICIAL WEIGHT:
205½ POUNDS



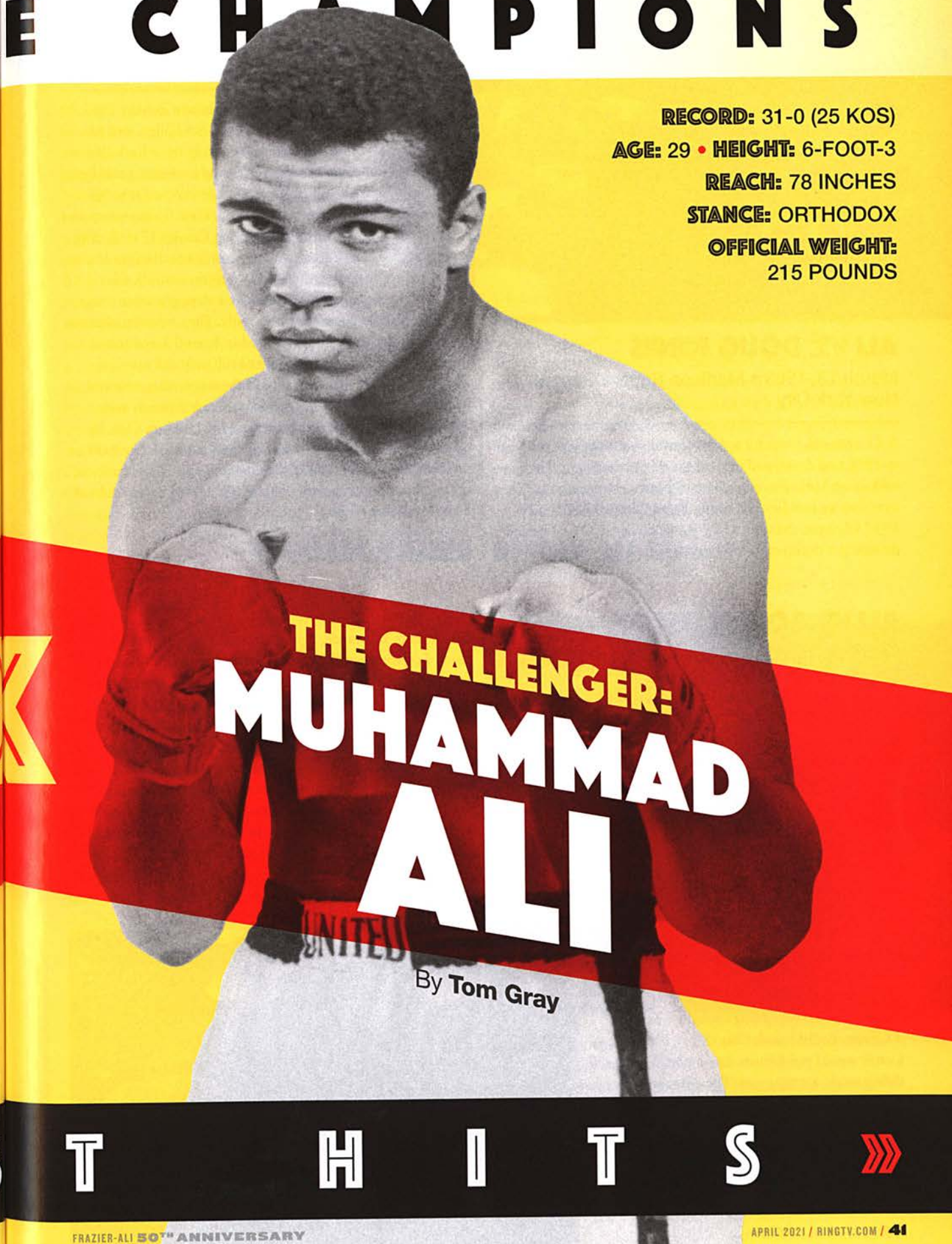
THE CHAMPION: JOE FRAZIER

By **Ron Borges**

X

THE CHALLENGER: MUHAMMAD ALI

By **Tom Gray**



RECORD: 31-0 (25 KOS)
AGE: 29 • **HEIGHT:** 6-FOOT-3
REACH: 78 INCHES
STANCE: ORTHODOX
OFFICIAL WEIGHT:
215 POUNDS

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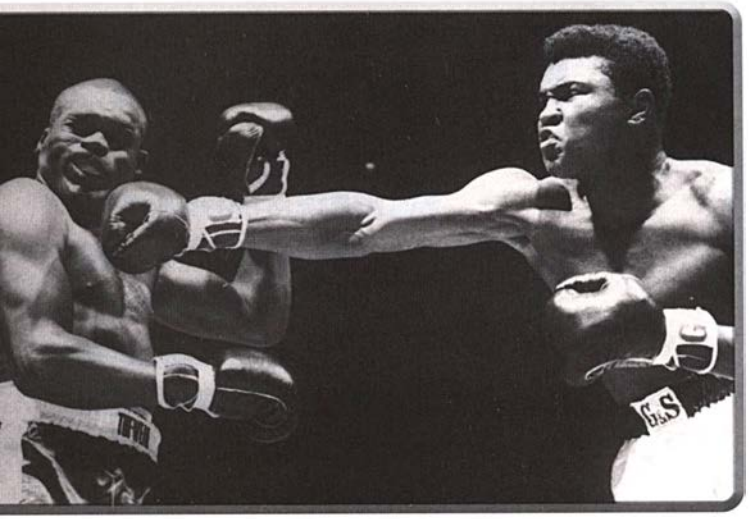
PHOTOS BY BETTMANN



ALI VS. DOUG JONES

March 13, 1963 • Madison Square Garden, New York City

A 21-year-old Jones turned professional at middleweight in 1958 and developed into an excellent technician. The slick New Yorker won his first 19 bouts – scoring wins over former middleweight king Bobo Olson (KO 6) and 1952 Olympic champion Pete Rademacher (KO 5) – before dropping a decision to top heavyweight contender Eddie Machen (UD 10). Despite that setback, Jones was offered a vacant world title fight that would crown the successor to long-reigning light heavyweight champion Archie Moore. Jones dropped a 15-round unanimous decision to the excellent Harold Johnson in May 1962, and a third consecutive defeat, to Zora Folley, sent his career into a tailspin. Determined to bounce back, Jones stopped unbeaten prospect and future all-time great light heavyweight champ Bob Foster, then claimed revenge over Folley via seventh-round knockout. That victory set up a showdown with the emerging Cassius Clay. Riding a streak of 17 straight wins, 14 inside the distance (most of which he had predicted down to the round), Clay contemptuously viewed Jones as a stepping stone – an outlook that almost proved costly. The unbeaten phenom was shaken up by a right hand in Round 1 and tested throughout by Jones, who fought brilliantly. All sessions were competitive, but Clay closed the show with a furious burst in the 10th and final round to secure a points win. After changing his prediction during the buildup, Clay, as quoted by John Cottrell in a 1967 book entitled *The Man of Destiny*, said afterward, "I called it in six. Then I called it in four. Four and six, that's 10, right?" The bout was named Ring Magazine Fight of the Year.

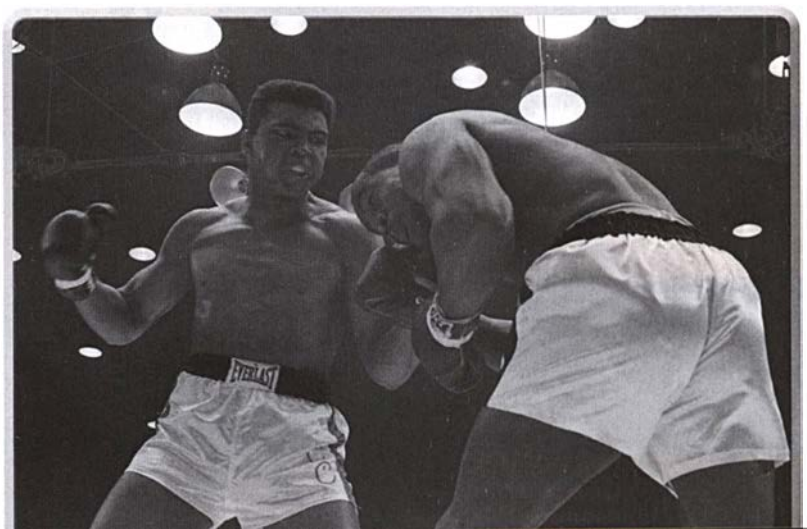
RESULT: ALI UD 10

ALI VS. SONNY LISTON

February 25, 1964 • Convention Center, Miami Beach, Florida

Charles "Sonny" Liston will always be a footnote in Ali's career, but that does him a horrible disservice. The bone-crunching destroyer from Arkansas by way of St. Louis wiped out an entire division – defeating the likes of Nino Valdes, Cleveland Williams (twice), Eddie Machen and Zora Folley – before relieving Floyd Patterson of the heavyweight championship in just 126 seconds. A direct rematch lasted four seconds longer, and it was this destructive form that Liston carried into his second title defense. Following the Jones test, Clay had ventured to London to face Henry Cooper, and while the visitor won inside five rounds, as predicted, he was knocked off his feet by the popular Englishman with a left hook in the fourth. The prevailing thought was that if Cooper could knock Clay down, then Liston would put him six feet under. Things didn't work out that way. The 22-year-old Clay came of age in Miami Beach, befuddling the monstrous champion with a quick jab, dazzling combination work and incredible foot speed. Other than in the fifth round, when the challenger was mysteriously blinded by a foreign substance, Liston struggled to score with any kind of consistency. When Clay's eyes cleared, normal service resumed and a cut under Liston's left eye worsened. At the end of Round 6, the champion informed his corner that he'd had enough, and a new era had begun. The initial story was that Liston had pulled his left shoulder out of the socket, and there are many who believe that he was ordered by the mafia to take a dive. However, isn't it a strange coincidence that the winner of this fight would go on to establish himself as arguably the greatest heavyweight of all time? This bout was also named Ring Magazine Fight of the Year.

RESULT: ALI TKO 7



ALI VS. SONNY LISTON 2

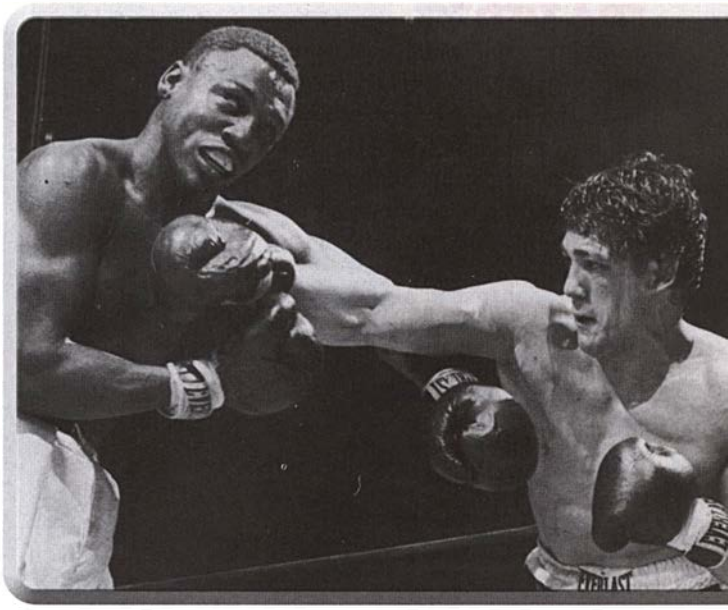
May 25, 1965 • Central Maine Civic Center, Lewiston, Maine

He won the title as Cassius Clay, but he would defend it as Muhammad Ali. Two days after his shocking upset of Liston, the new champion confirmed his affiliation with the Nation of Islam, and the following month he was bestowed his Muslim name by leader and teacher Elijah Muhammad. With his metamorphosis as man and fighter complete, Ali got back down to business. The Liston rematch was originally scheduled for November 16, 1964, in Boston, but Ali suffered a hernia three days before the bout and required emergency surgery. He would be out of action for six months. Despite winning the first encounter, Ali was the underdog heading into the return match. The consensus was that Liston hadn't prepared adequately and would right the wrongs emphatically in the sequel. But while the challenger had trained hard for the Boston bout, he was disheartened by the postponement and lacked motivation ahead of the new date. When the opening bell sounded, Liston looked slow and Ali was faster than ever. Midway through Round 1, the champion countered a ponderous left jab with a quick right-hand counter and Liston went down. The knockdown was legitimate, but it did not appear to be a fight-ending punch. Referee and former heavyweight champion Jersey Joe Walcott, apparently shocked by the turn of events, lost control of the action when Ali refused to go to a neutral corner. Liston rose and was immediately forced to cover up when Ali attacked with a flurry. However, timekeeper Francis McDonough and Ring Magazine founder Nat Fleischer signaled to Walcott that Liston had been counted out and Ali was awarded a first-round knockout win. The official time was 2:12. This was arguably the most controversial heavyweight championship fight of all time.

RESULT: ALI KO 1

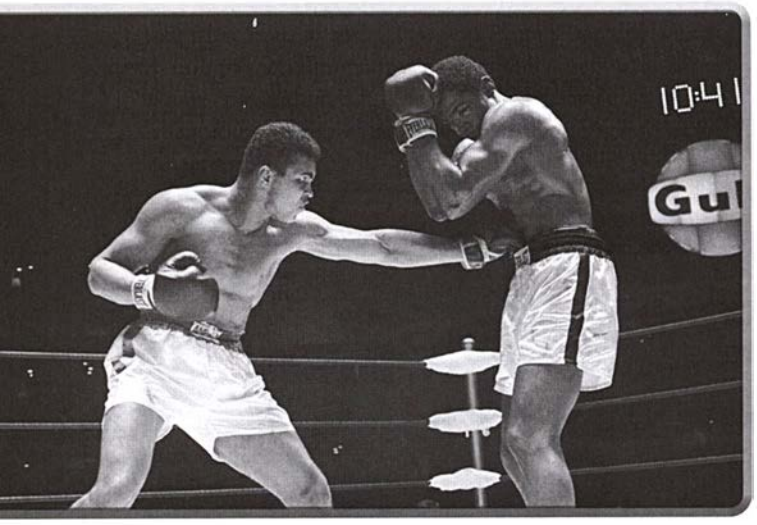
FRAZIER VS. OSCAR BONAVENA

September 21, 1966 • Madison Square Garden, New York City



On this night, a young and undefeated Joe Frazier stepped up in class for the first time and proved himself worthy by twice getting off the deck to win a 10-round split decision. Ranked No. 9 in the world, Oscar Bonavena was a bull of a man with a plodding but dangerous style and far more experience than the 22-year-old Frazier, who was in only his 12th professional fight. Frazier had stopped his previous 11 opponents but twice ran into short right hands in a nearly disastrous second round that put him on the canvas for the first time in his career. He didn't stay there long. Frazier shook off those right hands and took two mandatory eight counts before launching a vicious attack that easily won him the next four rounds as well as a close decision. His relentless body attack and inside fighting skills would become his trademark, but in this instance it led to Bonavena's manager, Sid Martin, loudly complaining that his fighter was the victim of repeated low blows. Bonavena did have a significant bruise on his thigh after the fight, and Martin contended Bonavena had been hit low at least six times in one round alone without Frazier being warned by referee Mark Conn. Nothing ever came of a threatened protest, and although the fight was close, Conn scored it 6-4 and judge Joe Eppy had it 5-4-1 for Frazier. Nick Gamboli had a 5-5 draw in rounds but, using the backup points system, had Bonavena winning 7-5 on the basis of giving Bonavena four points for the second-round knockdowns. The Associated Press scored the fight 6-3-1 and UPI had it 6-4, both for Frazier.

RESULT: FRAZIER SD 10



ALI VS. ERNIE TERRELL

February 6, 1967 • Houston Astrodome, Houston

When Ali elected to give Sonny Liston a direct rematch, the WBA stripped him of its portion of the title. Yes, boxing has been punching itself in the face for a very long time. Terrell would pick up the then-lightly regarded WBA bauble by virtue of a 15-round decision over Eddie Machen in March 1965, and he made two successful defenses against George Chuvalo (UD 15) and Doug Jones (UD 15). However, the boxing world knew who the real champion was and Terrell yearned for recognition. The pair were originally scheduled to meet in early 1966, but Ali's "I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong" statement forced him to fight abroad for several months and the bout was postponed. The buildup was nasty, with Terrell refusing to acknowledge the champion's Muslim name and Ali labelling his rival an "Uncle Tom." Ali also slapped Terrell across the face live on ABC television, and he vowed to punish and humiliate his opponent in the ring. That's exactly what he did. Ali started fast, busting through Terrell's guard with combinations before using his feet and reflexes to avoid return fire. As the rounds passed, the punishment intensified and so did the verbal taunting. The three-word question "What's my name?," which has become synonymous with Ali, was said over and over again and punctuated by blow upon blow. Terrell's left eye was badly damaged and he ended the contest with an injury that required surgery. The 6-foot-6 Chicago resident claimed that he was thumbed in Round 2, but video evidence is inconclusive. Ali claimed a lopsided decision win, and as a result of him regaining the WBA belt, he was named "The Undisputed Heavyweight Champion of the World." In truth, there never was a dispute.

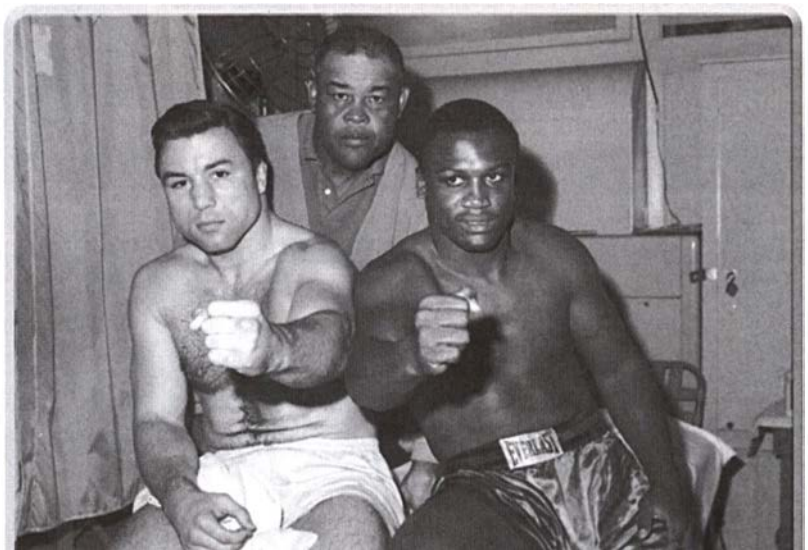
RESULT: ALI UD 15

FRAZIER VS. GEORGE CHUVALO

July 19, 1967 • Madison Square Garden, New York City

This was a coming-out party for the version of Frazier that came to be known as "Smokin' Joe." Now 16-0 with 14 knockouts, Frazier was matched with a man no one, not even Muhammad Ali, had been able to stop in 62 fights. It took Frazier less than 10 minutes to do what the others could not. Frazier battered Chuvalo's face from the opening bell until referee Johnny Colan mercifully stopped the carnage at 0:16 of Round 4. By then, Chuvalo had a deep gash over his right eye as well as a broken orbital bone; his left eye was also cut, and a cut on the top of his scalp left his face smeared with his own plasma when Colan finally arrived like the cavalry to save him. Frazier had improved markedly since defeating Bonavena less than a year earlier, having begun to fully develop the bob-and-weave style that allowed him to move effectively inside against far bigger men. He no longer retreated straight back and had found less costly ways to deliver the devastating left hook that would become his trademark. He made Chuvalo turn his back after two final, heavy-handed hooks crashed into his bloodied face, convincing Colan to act. Half-blind and solely unable to keep Frazier away, Chuvalo later would say it felt like he was being hit by four hands, not two. "He looks easy to hit, but he isn't easy," Chuvalo told Sports Illustrated's Mark Kram. "Everything moves – his head, shoulder, his body and his legs – and meanwhile he keeps punching and putting pressure. He fights six minutes every round. He doesn't let you live. Whoever gets him from here on will catch hell."

RESULT: FRAZIER TKO 4



FRAZIER VS. BUSTER MATHIS

March 4, 1968 • Madison Square Garden, New York City

With Ali now stripped of his heavyweight titles, Frazier fought Buster Mathis (who'd beaten Joe in the 1964 Olympic trials) for the New York State Athletic Commission's version of the championship. Although the winner wouldn't eclipse Ali in the public's eyes, this was the first title fight of Frazier's career and he wore down Mathis the way he would so many others – with brutal body shots that preceded a final, crushing left hook to the head. Outside the packed Garden, protesters organized by Black activist groups marched in support of Ali, who had been stripped of his title and license to box after refusing to be drafted into the Army a year earlier. Inside, a crowd of 18,096 paid an indoor record $658,503 to witness Frazier's coronation after his management team declined to take part in a WBA-organized eight-man elimination tournament. Mathis, a slick boxer despite his size, kept things close for nearly half the fight, but Frazier's relentless pressure and sizzling body shots slowly took away his legs. Outweighed by nearly 40 pounds, Frazier nevertheless consistently slipped inside and damaged Mathis, finally exhausting him in the same way a matador slowly reduces a heaving bull into a victim. That time arrived late in Round 11 when Frazier unleashed a thunderous left hook that sent Mathis tumbling to the floor for the first time in his career. Bloody and confused, Mathis fell onto his back and halfway through the bottom strand of rope. When he struggled to his feet, he was groggy enough that referee Arthur Mercante took one look at him and waved his arms in a gesture that left Joe Frazier as the "world" heavyweight champion of New York, Illinois, Maine and Massachusetts. Some days it really is a small world after all.

RESULT: FRAZIER TKO 11

FRAZIER VS. OSCAR BONAVENA 2

December 10, 1968 • The Spectrum, Philadelphia

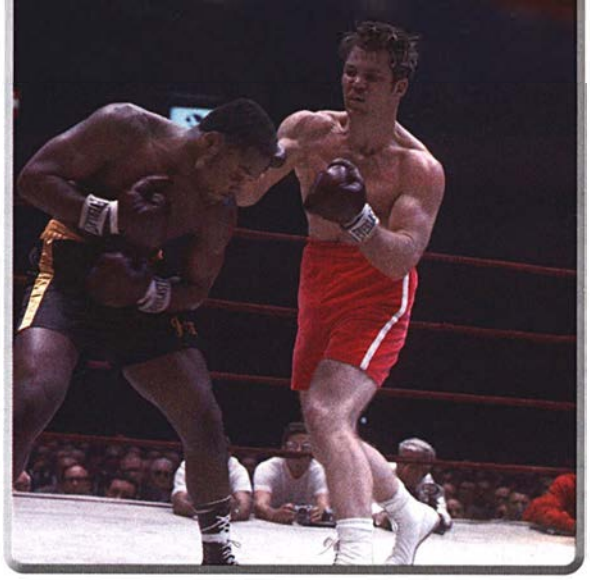
By now, Frazier held only a portion of the fractured heavyweight title, the rest in the possession of former Ali sparring partner Jimmy Ellis. Ellis was at ringside among a small crowd of only 8,100 watching Frazier pummel Bonavena for 15 mostly one-sided rounds. None of the problems Bonavena had posed two years earlier existed, as Frazier's constant head and shoulder movement kept him away from the shots that had dropped him twice in their first meeting. What remained was Frazier's relentless attack on the inside. Although he again could not drop Bonavena, Frazier left him cut over both eyes, bleeding from the bridge of the nose and with welts rising on his face as the fight dragged on. Bonavena's inability to do anything to keep Frazier away resulted in him spending most of the fight with his back pinned to the ropes and his gloves held high to protect what was left of his face. This may have kept him upright, but it also served Frazier well because he was free to repeatedly wallop Bonavena to the body. Having complained loudly about low blows after their first fight, Bonavena now offered a new tactic: He regularly threw punches below boxing's demilitarized zone. He was warned for low blows by referee Joe Sweeney in the third, eighth, 10th, and 12th rounds and lost a point in the eighth for repeated infractions. Frazier never said a word. He just kept punching until he'd hammered out a comprehensive unanimous decision. Ellis was still unimpressed, saying, "I fought the same guy … a year ago and knocked him down twice. Frazier is lucky that wasn't me in there with him. His jaw would be wired up today." Legendary sports columnist Red Smith seemed to see things differently, writing, "The unbarbared Argentinian … hung in there like something in the hall closet." As things turned out, when poor Bonavena got back to his hotel room, there was nothing in his hall closet. It had been burglarized while he was being assaulted.

RESULT: FRAZIER UD 15

MATHIS: HERB SCHARFMAN/SPORTS IMAGERY; BONAVENA: BETTMANN

FRAZIER VS. JERRY QUARRY

June 23, 1969 • Madison Square Garden, New York City



Frazier was 23-0 with 20 knockouts when he stepped in to face the man Ellis had defeated to win the WBA portion of the title. Quarry met Frazier in the center of the ring in the opening round, and it seemed the two might never take a backward step as they slammed away at each other with primal ferocity. Quarry landed several hard right hands to the chin, but Frazier neither wobbled nor retreated. Unfortunately for Quarry, that was a warning of what was to come. Frazier took over in the second round with a two-fisted attack that tore up Quarry's body and badly lacerated his right eye. That eye finally split wide open in the early moments of Round 4 and the tide quickly began to turn on Quarry, who still bravely kept trying to catch Frazier with a concussive counter shot. Dr. Harry Kelian examined Quarry's eye after the round with Quarry begging him not to intervene. He did not, and Quarry paid a savage price for it in rounds 5, 6 and 7. The Californian was as tough as a $2 piece of beef, but by the end of the seventh round, his face resembled one. It was then that Dr. Kelian returned to Quarry's corner to examine what was now a bloody slit masquerading as an eye and told referee Arthur Mercante the fight was over. "I stopped it to prevent a slaughter," Kelian said long after the slaughter had begun. "He pleaded with me to let it go on after the fourth round, but he didn't say much when I looked at him after the seventh." Quarry had admitted to Mercante that he could no longer see out of his right eye, but hopeless though his situation was, his gameness was clear as he wept on his stool when the fight was stopped. At the time, Mercante and judge Tony Castellano had Frazier up 6-1 in rounds. Judge Bill Rec was only slightly kinder, scoring the bout 5-1-1 for Frazier. Sitting in the crowd once again was Ellis, who taunted Frazier in the ring after the fight. Eight months later, he would find himself there again, but the talking was over.

RESULT: FRAZIER TKO 7

FRAZIER VS. JIMMY ELLIS

February 16, 1970 • Madison Square Garden, New York City

Six years removed from winning an Olympic gold medal in Tokyo, when he replaced the injured Buster Mathis, Joe Frazier now found himself facing Ellis for the Ring Magazine, WBA, WBC and NYSAC heavyweight titles. While the long shadow of the still-absent Ali hung over the fight, no one questioned that the winner would be the rightful man to face the long-exiled champion. Joe Frazier didn't waste much time declaring who that was. Ellis' quick jab, foot speed and ring acumen allowed him to control most of the first two rounds. He found ways to keep Frazier at a safe distance and avoided his powerful left hook, but a man can run from a gunfight only so long once the bullets start to fly. When they did, Ellis was no match for Frazier's firepower. Frazier promised before the fight, "I'll come out smokin'," and from midway through the second round onward, he did. Once Frazier found his proper punching distance and a safe road to reach it, Ellis' chances went up in smoke. Or more accurately, down in it. As Frazier's left hooks began to land, Ellis unraveled. Early in Round 4, Frazier dropped him with a lashing left and the WBA titleholder struggled to beat the count. He got up at nine, but soon a second left hook sent him tumbling onto his backside in the middle of the ring as Frazier glanced down at him with a disdainful glare. Ellis again rose at nine but did so only after the bell sounded to end the round. The one-minute interval in his corner was not enough to revive Ellis, who could not answer the bell for Round 5. Joe Frazier now ruled the heavyweight division, although he and the rest of the world knew that no matter what he did, that crown would not be fully his until he faced Ali.

RESULT: FRAZIER TKO 4

Ron Borges is an award-winning sportswriter. He received the BWAA's Nat Fleischer Award for Excellence in Boxing Journalism in 1993.

ALI VS. JERRY QUARRY

October 26, 1970 • City Auditorium, Atlanta

Following several unsuccessful attempts to secure a boxing license, Ali finally saw light at the end of the tunnel when Georgia Senator Leroy Johnson committed to staging a bout between the former champion and Jerry Quarry. On September 2, 1970, an overweight Ali warmed up with eight exhibition rounds against prospects Rufus Brassell and George Hill at Morehouse College in Atlanta. His comeback opponent, however, was far from being a prospect. The October 1970 issue of Ring Magazine rated Quarry as the No. 1 heavyweight in the world, and the gutsy Californian held wins over Floyd Patterson, Thad Spencer and Buster Mathis. In 1969, Quarry was stopped by Joe Frazier (TKO 7) – in the Ring Fight of the Year – and he mistimed the referee's count in an unfortunate loss to George Chuvalo (KO 7). However, a crushing sixth-round knockout triumph over previously unbeaten power-puncher Mac Foster had reignited his career. On paper, Ali was taking a huge risk in what was his first fight since knocking out Zora Folley (KO 7) over three-and-a-half years earlier. Despite being a non-title affair, the Ali-Quarry bout was a massive event that carried the majesty of a world championship fight, and it was scheduled for 15 rounds. A sleek 213½-pound version of Ali showed up on fight night and started fast, landing the jab at will and firing off some nice combinations. Despite spots of ring rust, Ali managed to time his man with a near-invisible right counter in the third round that produced a horrible gash over Quarry's left eye. A follow-up burst of accurate rights worsened the damage, and the doctor stopped the fight at the end of the round. Ali was back, and the heavyweight division was put on notice.

RESULT: ALI TKO 3

ALI VS. OSCAR BONAVENA

December 7, 1970 • Madison Square Garden, New York City

With the enormous financial success of the Ali-Quarry showdown, it was only a matter of time before the ex-champion was granted a license in other states, and New York was only too happy to get back in the Ali business. Having dealt with Quarry in short order, and with a superfight against Frazier pending, trainer Angelo Dundee was eager to see Ali tested physically. Argentine powerhouse Oscar Bonavena was one of the most durable and rugged heavyweights around. Nicknamed "Ringo" due to his Beatlesesque hairstyle, the barrel-chested Bonavena was the first man to knock Frazier off his feet, dropping the Philly warrior twice in a 1966 bout that Bonavena lost via 10-round split decision, and he was also gutsy in a rematch that went the full 15 rounds. Like Patterson and Terrell before him, Bonavena taunted Ali by calling him Clay, and there was genuine animosity during the buildup. Ali vowed to punish his opponent, but unlike the Patterson and Terrell massacres, this fight was anything but one-sided in his favor. Despite having had one comeback bout, Ali struggled to find a rhythm, and Bonavena's unpredictable raids gave him hell. The former champ was ahead on points entering the 15th and final round, but the critics were sharpening their knives as the seconds ticked away on a disappointing performance. Midway through that session, however, Ali nailed Bonavena with a counter left hook that sent the Argentine sprawling to the canvas. Aided somewhat by referee Mark Conn, who failed to implement mandatory eight counts or send Ali to a neutral corner, "The Greatest" prevailed on the three-knockdown rule, becoming the first and only man to stop Bonavena. "It was the toughest fight I ever had," said Ali afterward. The bout wouldn't hold that distinction for long.

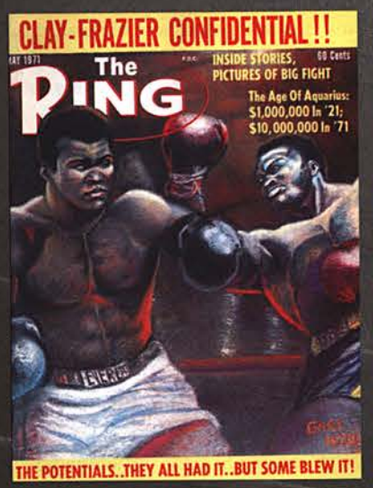
RESULT: ALI TKO 15

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

FRAZIER-CLAY CONFIDENTIAL

THOUGH JOE'S WIN DECISIVE, MANY QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

By **Dan Daniel**



This feature originally appeared in the May 1971 issue of The Ring Magazine.

Editor's note: Some of the author's language and views may be considered offensive. In the interest of historical integrity, we did not remove the author's original words from the story. We present this archival material as it was originally published (including the title of the article), in part, to document the perspectives, issues and social context of the times, which include the attitudes and opinions of the people who covered the fights.

On the aftermath of Joe Frazier's emphatic victory over Cassius Clay by unanimous decisions of referee Arthur Mercante and judges Bill Recht and Artie Aidala, after a frenetic 15-round battle before 20,455 spectators in New York's Madison Square Garden, quite a few questions and quite a few established facts present themselves.

The most interesting question is this: Could Clay, at his peak four years ago, have escaped defeat, which was clinched by a left hook which decked the Muslim in the 15th round?

Clay threw a lot of punches, but they were mostly for show and at no time had Frazier in danger.

Why did Frazier, after punishing his man with body blows in the first four rounds, switch to the head?

When this question was put to Yancey Durham, the champion's trainer-manager, he replied, "Because I told him to." When Yank was pressed for more explicit information, he refused to extend his remarks.

Did Frazier's efforts realize his ultimate potential against Clay? In the light of what Joe found out about Cassius, would the titleholder be expected to stop his man in a second meeting?

Is there to be a return engagement, and where?

Did the fight, with its $150 ringside admission price, the $5,000,000 guaranteed, share and share alike, to the contestants, come up to expectations and justify the attendant hysteria?

BETTMANN

FRAZIER-CLAY CONFIDENTIAL

Reviewing the facts established by the 45 minutes of action, we find these outstanding:

1. Clay's unorthodox conduct right through the fight, with the exception of the 11th and 15th rounds, in which he was in serious danger of a knockout, established him as the standout actor in heavyweight history. He made John Barrymore at his best look and sound like a busher of the footlights.
2. Muhammad set himself up as the master of in-ring insult, and effort to turn derision, in spite of pain, into a useful weapon. In that regard he was the most active perpetrator in the history of heavyweight glove fighting.
3. It was easy to see, after only a few rounds, that Clay had lost much of his old speed. This was reflected in many giveaways, notably in his limited use of the uppercut, which in the past had been Clay's vital weapon.
4. If there had been any question about Clay's gameness and ability to take punishment, it was dissipated completely. Some of the outstanding titleholders and contenders of the past would have wilted under Frazier's attack.
5. Joe indicated that he was safe, for some time to come, from serious threat to his leadership. Eliminate Clay and the only current heavyweight who might draw with Frazier in the future is George Foreman, who is being nursed along carefully with a title shot in view once Muhammad is erased from the scene, either by another defeat by Frazier or a Supreme Court verdict sending him to a Federal penitentiary for anywhere from two to five years for refusal to respect an Army draft.
6. Cassius turned in a better fight than experts had expected and lost by a margin of six rounds against nine (the writer's count), with the 11th and 15th most decisive in accentuating the former champion's setback.

Clay did not show up in the interview room after the fight. He had gone to Flower-Fifth Avenue Hospital to have his swollen jaw examined. It turned out that there was no fracture, merely a condition which the surgeons called a hematoma.

Taking Clay's place for post-fight questioning was Drew Brown, the Great Bundini, who said nothing significant and pulled a real rock when he said, "No soldier quits in the fox hole."

Bundini blanched when he realized that he had misdirected his verbosity. Clay was nowhere near a fox hole even in thought during the 45 minutes of fighting which produced his first defeat after 31 victories, 25 of them by KO. For Frazier, the victory was No. 27, 23 by knockout.

Clay's knockdown in the 15th round was only the third of his professional career, his defeat only the second of his entire ring life. [Editor's note: The article is reprinted here in its original form, but it should be said that Ali had at least five losses as an amateur.]

Before Cassius won the title, he was decked by Sonny Banks in New York in 1962 and by Henry Cooper in 1963 in London. Banks was dispatched in four, Henry in five.

During the post-fight questioning, Frazier said, "I don't think he will want another fight."

However, the scuttlebutt now current is that Frazier and Clay will meet again, in the Forum at Inglewood, Cal., which is owned by Jack Kent Cooke.

Cooke signed the papers under which he became a partner in the Garden fight by guaranteeing $4,500,000 of the $5,000,000 assured to Frazier and Clay.

The dope is that there already is an understanding whereby each fighter will receive $1,000,000.

The Forum has been a highly successful enterprise, under the boxing management of the veteran George Parnassus.

Insofar as the official scoring of the fight was concerned, there was no room for doubt or uncertainty.

Referee Mercante called it 8 to 6, with one even; Recht saw it a most complete triumph for Joe, 11 to 4; and Aidala sent in a 9-6 card.

The drama of the night found few counterparts in heavyweight history, even covering the Dempsey-Tunney Long Count second fight, in Chicago.

Round after round, the conviction fastened itself on the experts that Clay was being beaten. They weren't fooled by his play-acting, by his headshaking denials of injury and pain whenever he was hit hard, by his spending so much time backed against the ropes, mainly for periods of rest, by his repeated futile sticking out of his left and whirling it under Joe's nose. Clay used his advantage in reach of six-and-a-half inches to some purpose, but not importantly.

At the noontime weigh-in, Frazier tipped the beam at 205½ pounds, while Clay hit it at 215. Clay also had the advantage in height, standing 6 feet 3 as against 5 feet 11¼ for Frazier.

The emotional impact of the fight, rising minute by minute, achieved a shrieking crescendo in the 15th round when Joe unleashed a terrific left hook which found its target on Clay's right cheek and sent him sprawling on his back.

Down went Cassius, amid excitement rarely matched in heavyweight title history.

The general supposition was that Clay had been knocked out. But he jumped up quickly and, summoning whatever faculties still were functioning, he put on a flurry. Soon, the bell!

Referee Mercante handled the exciting situation with coolness and skill, in sharp contrast to the 15th round situation not so long ago in the Garden ring, when Clay decked Bonavena thrice.

How New York was thrown into hysterical expenditure to make the $1,352,952 gate at the Garden, by the unprecedented harvests of the scalpers and the dealers in counterfeit tickets, by the dramatic response of the spectators, by the bizarre accoutrements of so many of the spectators, is a story yet to be told.

When it was all over, there was wholehearted appreciation of Joe Frazier, of Philadelphia, age 27, not so many years ago a $75-a-week worker in an abattoir.

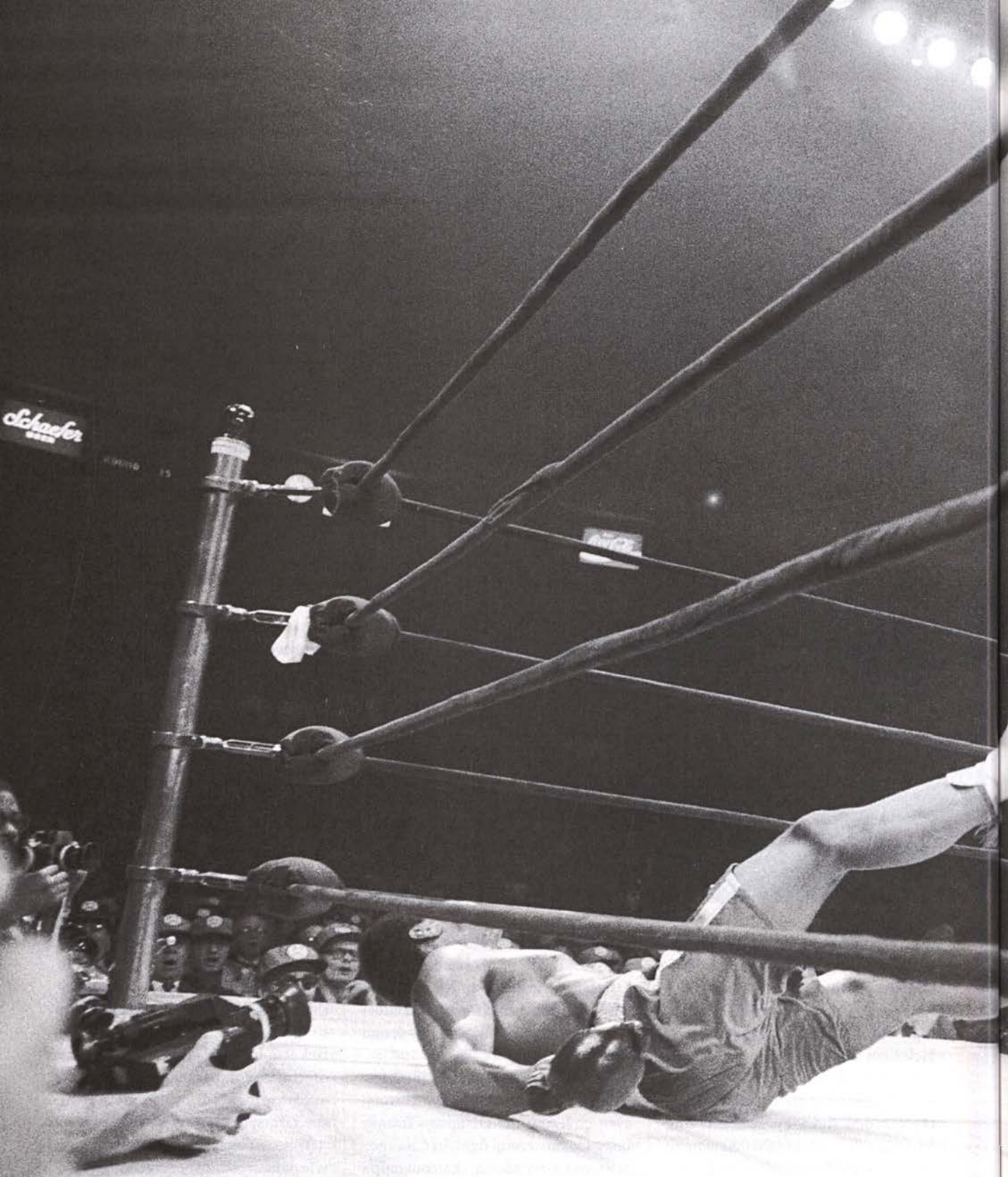
It was a bad night for the Clays. Not only was Cassius beaten, but Clay's younger brother, Rudy, was a loser in a six-rounder with Britain's Doc McAlinden. RNG

Frazier, the quintessential left hooker, landed his fair share of rights during the showdown.

BEING THERE

By **Larry Merchant**

THE WORLD AS SEEN FROM THE CENTER OF THE **FRAZIER-ALI** STORM



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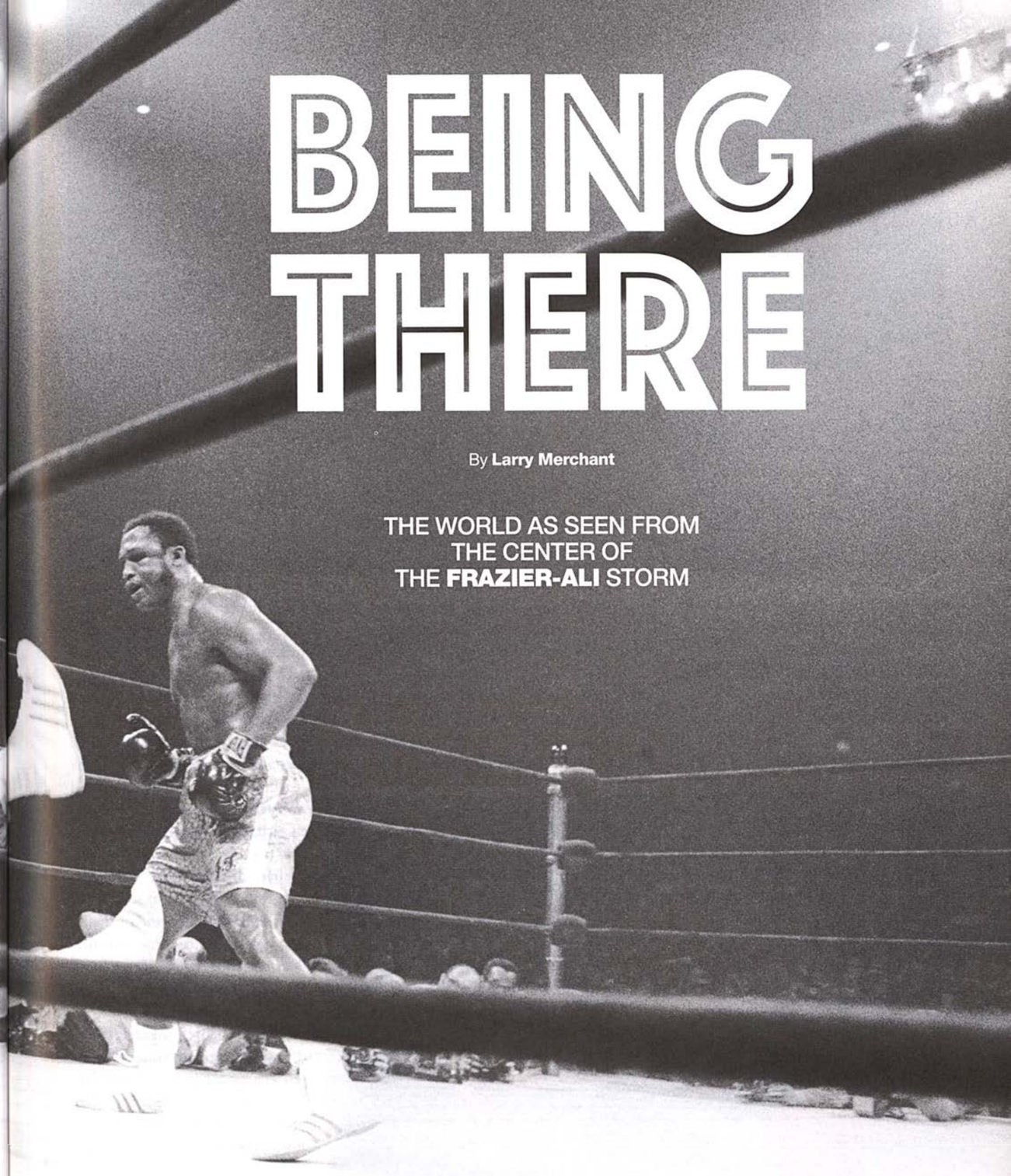


Before 1971, there was 1910 and 1938. Years when heavyweight rumbles shook the earth. Morphed into visceral symbols of political and cultural unrest. Reaching a crescendo with Ali-Frazier, two undefeated champions. I had visions of Eskimos watching them in igloos, natives on remote Polynesian islands, cellular life on Mars.

1910. Jack Johnson, the first Black heavyweight champion, challenged by Jim Jeffries, a long-retired champ answering the pleas of distraught fans to make everything right, i.e., White, again. It was in Reno and it was not to be. Johnson taunted "The Great White Hope" for 14 rounds and stopped him in the 15th. America's sore-loser racists then did what they do, rioted, in cities from sea to shining sea. Twenty or so Black people were killed. The Feds added insult by contriving a law that charged Johnson with transporting

(White) women across state lines for illicit purposes. Johnson, a master counterpuncher, promptly transported himself to Paris, where he spent much of the next decade before retiring.

Sidebar. In 1970, not '71, Ali emerged from a three-and-a-half-year state-sponsored retirement on account of he refused to be drafted during the controversial war in Vietnam. (The Supreme Court would vindicate him.) A couple nights before he beat Jerry Quarry in Atlanta, we found ourselves standing outside a movie theater after watching a documentary about ... Jack ... Johnson. I was then one of the young media dogs who barked and wagged at Ali's parade of amazements, representing the Philadelphia Daily News, where I was sports editor and columnist.

"You think I'M crazy?" Ali said to my bemused self. "Jack Johnson was REALLY crazy." Translated: Ali did not mess with White women.

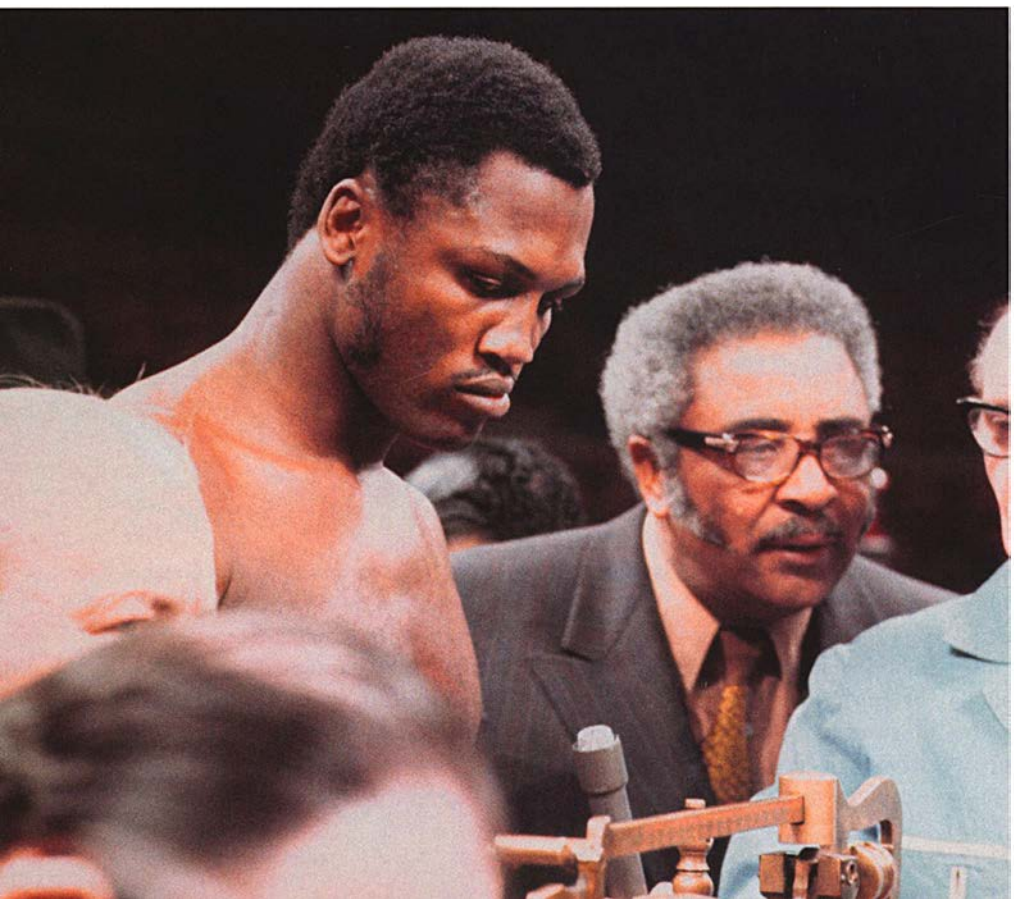
1938 is personal. After dinner, my father told my 7-year-old self that I could stay up late for the broadcast of the Schmeling-Louis war of the worlds. At nearby Yankee Stadium, my favorite place. I sensed something cosmic was happening, because I had seen headlines in newspapers and heard fevered reports on the radio. Though Schmeling wasn't a Hitler cultist, he was cast as the evil German, from a country we had fought in World War I and were seemingly headed for a dreaded rematch. Joe Louis was our guy, the good guy, America. He had been the first Black fighter to fight for the title since, and because of, Jack Johnson. I heard the mad Hitler on shortwave radio as my mother moaned. His pro-Aryan rants, interpreted by our foreign correspondents, sounded, in his native tongue, like live machine-gun bullets from across the ocean. It was bigger than a big fight, like Johnson-Jeffries before and Ali-Frazier after.

As we all know, Louis demolished Schmeling and deflated Hitler in one round. Joe Louis would become our first Black hero. I like to say that he ended the fight so fast because he didn't want me to stay up too late.

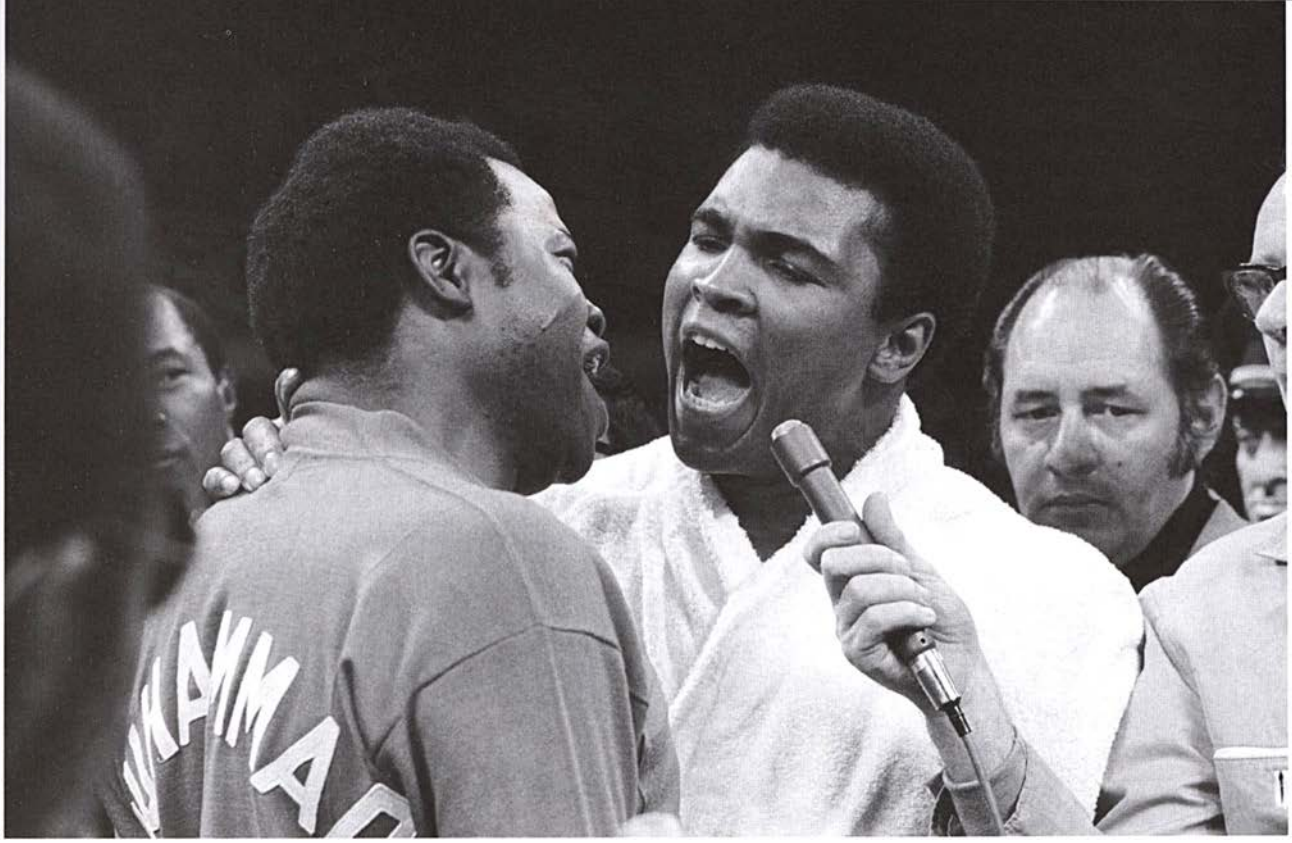
Cut to 1971 and the long-awaited showdown between two great fighters with contrasting styles in and out of the ring, during a national nervous breakdown. President John and brother Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King were murdered in the '60s, and President Nixon would soon be booted out of office. Then an anti-war movement, civil rights and pro-women movements, with uplifting or maddening marches and protests, and the equally serious currents of psychedelic drugs, new young music, free love, crazy clothing. Changes "blowin' in the wind" that divided us. Liberals rooted for Ali, conservatives rooted against Ali or for Frazier, as though their lives and their children's futures depended on it. I went to a Beatles press conference once for the hell of it.

I knew and loved Ali and Joe both. Maybe I adored Ali a little more because of his rebellious spirit and unrivaled showmanship. Early on, I spent a couple hours with him at his home in Miami. And left laughing. I knew Joe Frazier in Philadelphia, where he had moved from a farm in South Carolina to develop his career. After he won gold in Tokyo in 1964, he had to stay on his job in a slaughterhouse to support his young family. A group of civic leaders, lawyers and ministers and such formed a company, Cloverlay, a variation of a group that had backed Ali in Louisville, so Joe could be a full-time professional. They sold 80 shares at $250, a total of $20,000. I bought one of them – a week's salary – as a stunt. I could then write about him as "my fighter." Eight months later, I had to sell the share, already valued at $2,000, because I needed to move into an apartment in New York for my new job at the Post. Joe never failed to remind me that I sold him short. In two years, a share was worth $14,000.

The fight, the big-bigger-biggest one, starts in memory when I had a rendezvous with



Frazier and his trainer-manager, Yank Durham, check the scales on fight day.



Ali and loquacious cohort Drew "Bundini" Brown ham it up at the weigh-in.

Jim Brown, the football god who had gone into acting and was a pal and fan of Ali. It might have been days before the opening bell. He asked me what I thought. I said I leaned toward Frazier because I didn't think Ali could be fully restored from those lost years. Brown nodded in agreement, but I wasn't sure what he truly felt. My pre-fight column veered in another direction. I wrote that Frazier might have beaten Ali on his best day, but I had to pick Ali because I wanted him to win.

My takeaways on the night. The dark-suited tough guys on the floor, politicians and their lawyers, mobsters, and their dolls. The celebrities led famously by Frank Sinatra covering the event for Life magazine. The visceral roars, unlike anything I had ever heard anywhere, exploding down the canyons and through the history of Madison Square Garden, over and over and over, round after round. When Ali pranced and danced and mugged, I winced because I felt that establishment officials would not look kindly at his act. That could be the difference between winning or losing a close round. Frazier taking more clean shots, more punishment, than I had ever seen a fighter take, blood on his face, blood on the canvas. But still digging after Ali, landing hard left hooks in close. He started to pull away in the middle rounds, but in the ninth Ali rocked him again and again. Frazier closed the show with a knockdown in the 15th.

I was sure that Frazier had at least won what I call the drama of a fight. Landing punches that can be seen from the rafters on a star opponent who rarely if ever is abused. And, surely, he would get credit for aggression, "making the fight," as they say. But I was among the few astigmatic dunces in the room who scored it for Ali.

I had no quarrel with the result, assuming that emotion had distorted clarity. But over time I began to question myself again.

The next day's Daily News, the largest-circulated newspaper in the country, had a provocative front page. On one side, Joe Frazier, his face a bloody pulp, with the headline: THE WINNER. On the other side Muhammad Ali, his face slightly distended but otherwise clear, with the headline: THE LOSER.

And then we would learn that Frazier spent more than a week in a Philadelphia hospital, recovering from bruising he took and the effort he gave.

And then way later, before Ali would decision Joe in the rematch and score a TKO in the third fight, which is widely regarded as the fiercest heavyweight fight ever, my colleague and friend Vic Ziegel, who had scored the first fight for Frazier, went into a studio to take the whole thing apart on film. Now I know you can no more take a fight apart punch-by-punch than you can break down an opera note-by-note. But here's what we found, long before the punch-stat tool was invented:

In one round, Ali landed 19 clean punches to Frazier's three, and one of the judges gave it to Frazier. Overall, Ali landed 180 or 190 clean punches to Frazier's 90.

What the hell, the fight generated the highest expectations and exceeded them.

And conservatives were consoled that the future was not there yet. Insincerely, I hope they did not bet their houses on the rest of the trilogy.

THE GREATEST VICTORY

ONLY TWO FIGHTS IN HISTORY, JOHNSON VS. JEFFRIES AND LOUIS-SCHMELING II, CAN MATCH THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF FRAZIER'S SHOWDOWN WITH ALI, BUT 'THE FIGHT OF THE CENTURY' WAS AN EVEN MATCHUP AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL AND SMOKIN' JOE WON

By **Don Stradley**

When he left the ring that night in 1971, Joe Frazier's body language betrayed the enormity of what he'd just endured. He moved slowly down the aisle at Madison Square Garden, keeping a hand on his trainer, Yank Durham, for support. He'd won the fight, but his opponent, Muhammad Ali, had inflicted some severe punishment on him. Frazier's face was so swollen that he refused to have his picture taken for several days, fearing people would think he'd actually lost. Add to this a lengthy hospital stay to deal with some serious post-fight health issues, followed by a 10-month sabbatical from the ring, and it seemed as if Frazier's response to the grandest night of his boxing life was to turn invisible. Perhaps this was to be expected. Winning what was the biggest spectacle in boxing history was bound to leave a man depleted. He'd not won a mere boxing match. He'd won an American moment.

Noticeable during the bout's immediate aftermath, however, was that the story being told was not Frazier's, but Ali's. The trio of

BETTMANN

The weigh-in over, Ali, seen here with trainer Angelo Dundee, rested at The Garden until fight time.

ringside commentators – veteran broadcaster Don Dunphy, Oscar-winning actor Burt Lancaster and former light heavyweight champion Archie Moore – were overheard during the end credits of the closed-circuit transmission. Their discussion concentrated almost entirely on Ali's bravery and the way he came back after being hurt. Dunphy finally offered some praise for the winner, probably just as Frazier was entering his dressing room in a state of near-collapse.

"Joe Frazier has just scored the biggest victory of his career," Dunphy said. Then he added, with a matter-of-fact inflection, "Of anybody's career." Dunphy's observation had merit, if only because he'd been calling fights for three decades and had been ringside for some classic events.

It is reasonable to rate Frazier's win over Ali as the greatest single victory in the annals of boxing. Red Smith of The New York Times, who had been writing about sports since the 1930s, described the fight as "the most hysterically ballyhooed promotion of all time," what with two young, undefeated heavyweights, each with a legit claim to being champion, each with superior talents, squaring off for an unprecedented amount of money, with the drama beamed to theaters all around the globe, stretching the limits of the available technology; riots broke out in venues where the signal broke. Logically, the winner of the biggest fight should be acknowledged as having recorded history's biggest win. Such arguments are difficult, though, and fruitless. All that is certain is that when it came to winning a contest of such import, only a few men had ever been in Frazier's shoes.

Joe Louis, for instance, in his 1938 bout with Max Schmeling, found himself not only defending the heavyweight title against the sole fighter who had beaten him at that point – Schmeling had knocked him out two years earlier – but was battling a German opponent just as the war in Europe was brewing. Louis destroyed Schmeling in one round and became a folk hero in the process. Of course, biographers have overplayed the war backdrop as if Louis were fighting Adolf Hitler himself, but it was a massive event, certainly the most discussed bout of the 1930s. Louis and Schmeling pulled more than 70,000 fans to Yankee Stadium while an estimated 100 million listened to the bout wherever radio signals could reach.

Though the audience was restricted to a dusty, makeshift stadium in Reno, the 1910 fight between heavyweight champion Jack Johnson and James J. Jeffries surely felt as if something major was at stake. Jeffries' backers had lured him out of retirement in hopes that he would level Johnson and strike a blow for White supremacy. Indeed, the bout attracted so much ugliness that more than two decades passed before another mixed-race bout would be held for the heavyweight title. Johnson stopped Jeffries in the 15th round and spent

several days afterward enjoying one wild reception after another. The Ring's founder, Nat Fleischer, actually accompanied Johnson on his train ride east from Reno and recalled the throngs of African Americans waiting at each station to get a glimpse of their hero. "When we reached New York," Fleischer noted in his 1958 autobiography, *50 Years at Ringside*, "the crowd was so dense the police had difficulty clearing a path for the homecoming party ..." In the same memoir, Fleischer barely mentioned Louis-Schmeling II, which suggests how large the Johnson-Jeffries fight loomed in his memory.

A powerful social undercurrent also elevated the first Ali-Frazier bout into something far beyond boxing. Some would say that it lacked the sheer historical weight of Louis-Schmeling II or Johnson-Jeffries, but the contest was startling in the way it seemed to erupt out of the era's political climate. Ali, the draft resister, so represented the radical left that Frazier became a de facto stand-in for the conservative crowd. Frazier couldn't have cared less about such things; he was there to defend his title and make money. For that matter, conservatives were less interested in seeing Frazier win than to see Ali lose. Still, so strong was the fight's political atmosphere that when theater critic Kenneth Tynan mentioned it in one of his published diaries, he described Ali's defeat as a "belated epitaph of the Sixties," and labeled Frazier as Richard Nixon's "hatchet-man."

Linking Frazier to right-wing principles may sound odd, but much of the post-fight coverage was delivered with a countercultural bent. Many of the journalists who had supported Ali during his exile were decidedly left-leaning and looked at him as royalty, a fallen king without a domain. His personality, his place in the world, was simply too large to ignore, his tale too compelling. In comparison, Frazier seemed painfully old-fashioned, not a king but a mere fighter, as Norman Mailer described

Legendary former champion Joe Louis was never going to miss The Fight.

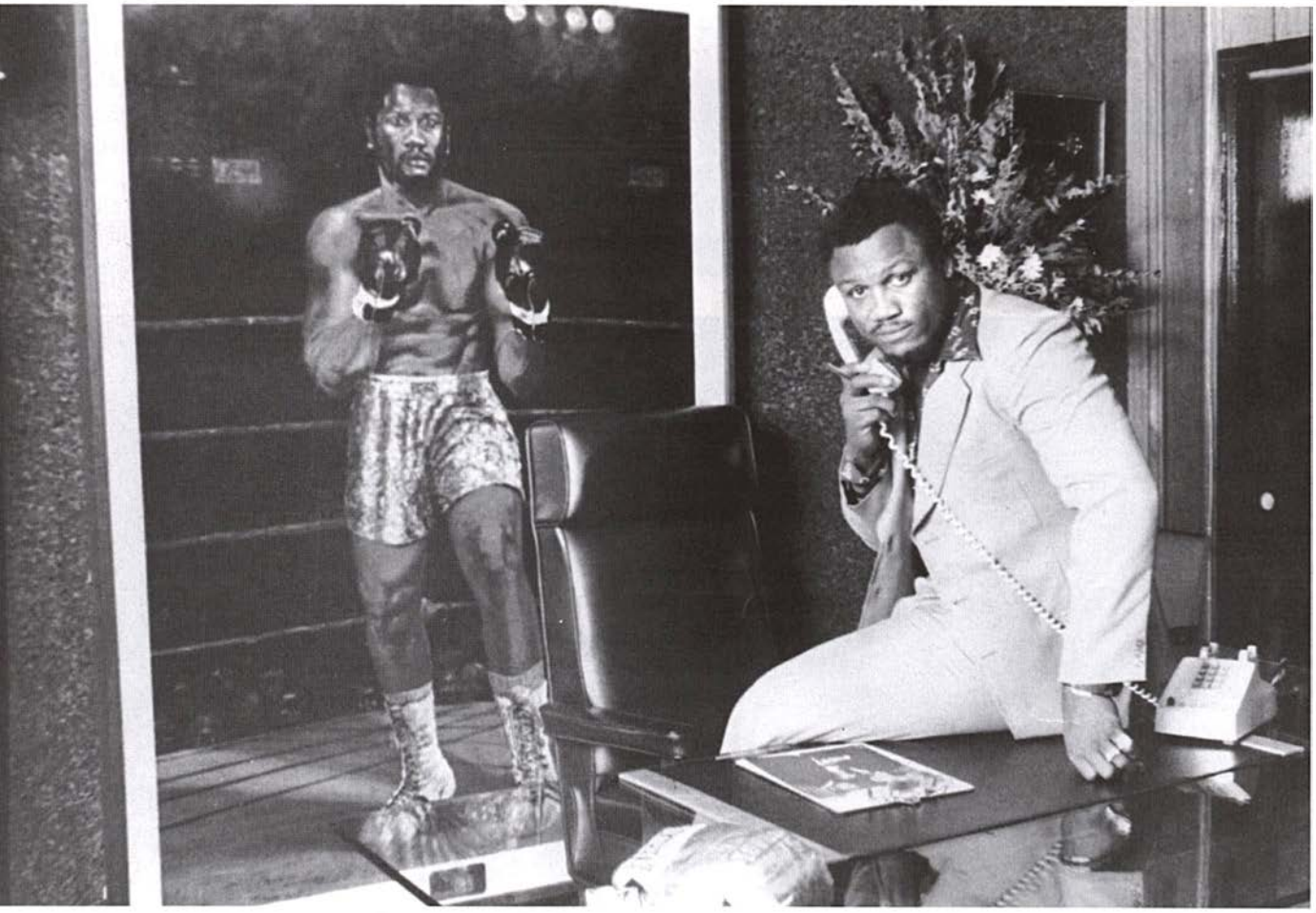
him, with the "face of a man who spent his days laboring in the pits." The irony is that Frazier was cool – he spoke in a kind of musician's patter, had a closet full of trendy clothes and even fronted a rock band in his free time – but to the press and the general public, he was about as interesting as a farmhand, still reeking from the slaughterhouses of his youth.

Frazier's problem was that he'd beaten a man who was already a sort of living legend. The scenario was supposed to see Ali stand up to the government and then regain the heavyweight championship of which he'd been unjustly stripped. Ali had the liberals, the hippies, the war protesters and just about anyone under 30 on his side. The majority of Black fans were with him, too. The table was set for Ali to stick it to the U.S. government and everyone else on the wrong side of history. All he had to do was beat Frazier. Then Frazier swooped in with his left hook and ruined the story.

Granted, many had rooted against Ali – Scottish journalist Hugh McIlvanney claimed to have heard White American reporters shouting for Frazier to "Kill the sonofabitch" – but whatever satisfaction they took in his downfall was brief. Though humble in defeat, Ali eventually saw to it that Frazier's win was downplayed. With the instincts of a seasoned spin doctor, Ali assured his followers that he'd deserved the decision, that the ringside judges were biased against him, and that it was clear who won simply by looking at Frazier's face after the bout. Using only his tireless mouth, Ali dismantled Frazier's achievement with the effectiveness of a wrecking ball. Most damning for Frazier was that a chunk of the population was swayed by Ali's argument. "You saw the fight," Frazier once said to columnist Jerry Izenberg. "You know I won. So what I got to do to convince everyone? What the hell I got to do?"

In a way, Frazier's win was so big that he could hardly live up to it. The best the press could say for him was that he was an "honest" and "hard-working" champion, words that seemed rubber-stamped into every story about him. Stranger still was how the status quo remained unchanged. Ali was everywhere, talking nonstop; Frazier, the quiet family man, remained in his shadow. It was as if Ali gained more from losing than Frazier did from winning.

Frazier found himself in the same light as Gene Tunney after his second victory over Jack Dempsey. By the time of that 1927 bout, Dempsey



Frazier, seen here in 1972, was the champion, but he was still overshadowed by Ali.

stood taller than ever in the minds of his fandom. He'd lost the heavyweight championship to Tunney the previous year but had been gallant in defeat and now seemed destined to regain the laurels. He even knocked Tunney to the canvas for the legendary "long count," proof that he still had a champion's punch, if not the sense to go to a neutral corner. But Tunney rose, won the decision and spoiled the fantasy. Tunney understood Dempsey's hold on the nation, so he was civil after the bout, always giving Dempsey credit and respect. Tunney, however, didn't have to deal with the constant affronts that Frazier suffered from Ali.

Also unlike Tunney, who retired after one more bout, Frazier kept fighting. His return to boxing revealed a slightly different "Smokin' Joe," one who had lost some spark; he'd become a chubby, almost clumsy version of his old self, as if beating Ali had required the blowing of irreplaceable fuses. Gentleman Jim Corbett, the great champion of the early gloved era, once observed that all fighters have a night where they box better than they ever have and ever will again. He could've been speaking of Frazier, who had peaked majestically on March 8, 1971, but never quite regained that diabolical form, that mix of determination and hostility.

The fight that had captured the world's imagination was eventually revised and remade as the opening act of a much larger narrative, one that climaxed more than four years later in the Philippines, with Frazier's corner stopping the action after the 14th round. Once Ali emerged as the last man standing, the instantly fabled "Thrilla in Manila" appeared to supersede the first Ali-Frazier bout, as if he who wins last wins best. It also appeared that the end of the Vietnam War had somehow diminished the first bout's magnitude. When The Ring's editors compiled a coffee table book in 1981 called *The Great Fights*, the Manila bout received an entire chapter, while the first fight was given only a fleeting mention. During the 1990s and 2000s, as Ali's status grew and morphed into something like sainthood, Frazier was reduced to being a supporting player in the saga. As William Nack of Sports Illustrated put it, Frazier became "a dragonfly embedded in the amber of Ali's life and times."

Frazier's sourness increased each year, in equal measure to Ali's growth as an international symbol. However, his resentment toward Ali cost him. Ali's failing health had made him a pitiable figure, and Frazier's caustic comments toward his old rival were poorly timed. There were inklings, though, that the two men reached an understanding. In 2011, on the 40th anniversary of the first bout, and only seven months before his death, a mellow Frazier told the Associated Press that beating Ali had been "the greatest thing that ever happened in my life."

But was it boxing's biggest win? Yes, more than likely. Who'd argue against it?

In the half-century since, there have been some major upsets and a few victories that, with some generosity, might even be considered important. There have been extreme moneymakers, while advances in technology have allowed fights to be viewed by more people than ever. There have been some excellent fighters and performances that were spellbinding. But that first Ali-Frazier bout made everything else in the country stop cold for an hour. Even people who cared nothing for boxing were tuning in to their local radio stations that night, hoping for some updates, just to be part of it. With such electricity in the air, and an opponent who had seemed unconquerable, Frazier set about his mission with blinders on. He had to be aware of the pressure that was on him, but he smashed through it all. He was magnificent.

A brief moment of levity ahead of the heated 1974 rematch.

Consider this: While it's true that Ali was far from his best in 1971, he was still good enough to beat most any other heavyweight in the world. Frazier's win was hard-earned, one of the most rugged and difficult title defenses a heavyweight champion had ever made to keep his crown. Also, if Ali had won, it would've been heralded as the sports story of the decade and, certainly, the biggest win ever in the fight business. The noise would've reverberated for months. And so it should have for Frazier.

His failure to fascinate the masses shouldn't take away from Frazier's victory– his effort of 50 years ago remains a masterpiece of aggression – though it explains why he was often bitter. Frazier's role in history was not as a great or brilliant pugilist, but merely as Ali's *bête noir*, the storm through which Ali had to walk. Still, it should never be forgotten that when the whole world was watching, at a time when nothing else on the planet seemed to matter, the hand raised at the end of boxing's biggest night belonged to Joe Frazier. A simple fighting man had beaten the icon.

AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT THE FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

GENE KILROY, THE LAST SURVIVING MEMBER OF MUHAMMAD ALI'S INNER CIRCLE, SHARES HIS MEMORIES AND INSIGHT ON THE NIGHT JOE FRAZIER WOULD NOT BE DENIED

By **Tris Dixon**

"It scared the heck out of me," said Gene Kilroy.

Muhammad Ali's business manager watched as Ali landed flat on his back, triggering just about every flashbulb in Madison Square Garden.

Smokin' Joe Frazier had launched forward behind his almighty left hook and Ali plummeted to the deck.

It was a dramatic moment that has echoed through every meaningful heavyweight highlight reel since.

Ali rose at around four and held on to the top rope with his left glove, trying to stop the arena from spinning.

It may have been one of the great punches, but it wasn't enough to put Ali out.

Frazier surged forward trying to finish it, but Ali fought with him, showing typical courage and bravery.

"But he could always regroup," Kilroy added of his friend. "He jumped back up, and a lot of people

Frazier's devastating left hook produced arguably the most iconic knockdown in boxing history.

said with how he finished it he could have won the round if he didn't have the knockdown."

Regardless, the round was lost and so was the battle. Frazier won on points. The war ... that would rage for years, of course, as Ali and Frazier pivoted between respectful animosity and plain animosity.

It was billed as The Fight of the Century and it delivered on that incredible promise. Historically it's sometimes been a case of the bigger the fight, the bigger the letdown, but on that memorable night in 1971, Frazier and Ali went above and beyond, delivering a physical and emotional masterpiece that encapsulated the very best of what boxing has to offer. It is why it was not only the Fight of the Century but one of the must-see *events* of the century.

"Listen, the VIPs ... there were horses outside walking them in," remembered Kilroy. "I got tickets for Teddy Kennedy and his sister Pat – I think I got them four tickets – but it was unbelievable. Budd Schulberg wrote that he'd never seen so many fur coats in his life – and they were on the men!"

Ringside seats were going for $150 (around $1,000 in today's money) and the 20,455 in attendance helped the fighters net $5 million between them.

The likes of Burt Lancaster, Barbra Streisand, Dustin Hoffman, Sammy Davis Jr. and any number of celebrities – entirely from the A-list – filled the rows ringside, alongside gangsters and local dignitaries, and Frank Sinatra was there on the ring apron, shooting pictures for Life magazine.

"It was a spectacular occasion," said Kilroy. "Everybody who was anybody was there."

Kilroy, who had amazing experiences as part of Ali's inner circle, is not one to overuse superlatives, so when he says "It was unbelievable," it is not to be taken lightly. "I remember there were some crazy people in the ringside seats, and all of a sudden [former] Vice President (Hubert) Humphrey came in, they were his seats and they almost had a fight getting the guys that didn't belong there out. It was unbelievable."

There were some who contested that the Ali who squared up to Frazier the first time was not back to full fighting fitness following his three-and-a-half-year absence from boxing.

He'd beaten Jerry Quarry, but for Kilroy it was the next fight and the one before Frazier that showed his man was not only back, but that he was ready for the great Philadelphian. "Listen," said the

A credentialed Frank Sinatra wanted to be as close to the action as possible.

ROBERT RIGER

Ali was given a mandatory-eight count and was then fit to fight.

no-nonsense Kilroy, who now lives in Las Vegas with his treasure trove of priceless memories. "You've got to remember, Ali came back and knocked out Oscar Bonavena and no one ever knocked him down – so you can't say he wasn't ready."

With those notable scalps, and with Frazier coming in having stopped Quarry, WBA heavyweight titleholder Jimmy Ellis and light heavyweight king Bob Foster, the stage was set.

"Muhammad was happy; he was relaxed, he was glad to be there, but Joe Frazier was unbelievable," explained Kilroy, who was with Ali the day of the fight.

"When Ali went to the Garden for the weigh-in, we stayed there for the fight that night. His brother fought on the undercard and got beat (Rahaman lost to Danny McAlinden in a six-rounder), but nobody would have beaten Joe Frazier that night."

That's a line Kilroy allows himself to say with some regularity. He is full of respect for Joe despite his involvement in the other camp.

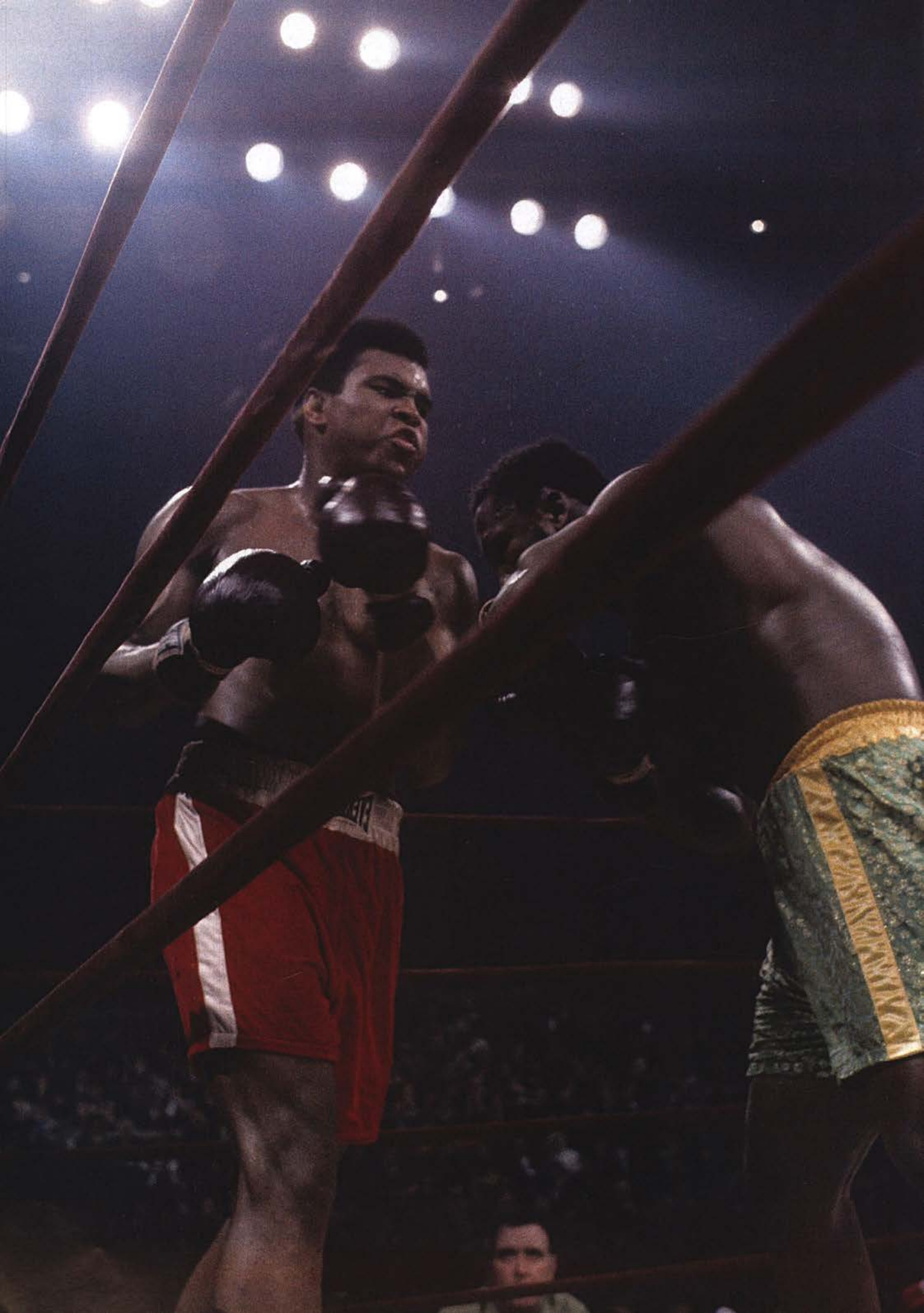
"You can't take anything away from him; he was a great heavyweight," Gene said. "Look at the division – from 1964 to 1974, you had the best heavyweights of all time. Any one of those would have been a heavyweight champion today. Joe was a great heavyweight. He fought everybody. He didn't duck anybody. He put on a good show. The fans were happy."

"The day after the fight, we drove the bus home to Cherry Hill, where Ali was living after I moved him out of Philadelphia, out of Pennsylvania where he didn't have to pay the big tax on wages," said Kilroy of what happened next. "After that fight, even with that jaw (swollen from the left hook knockdown), Ali didn't want to get it checked out in the hospital; he didn't want people saying Frazier had put him in hospital (Frazier *was* in the hospital). So Herbert Muhammad and I were in the car, and we took Ali to this doctor and he didn't have a broken jaw; he had a dislocation."

Kilroy is one of those that if it involved Ali and it actually happened, he can verify because he was there.

"I'll tell you something," he continued. "About a week after the fight, I was in New York with Ali and I got a call from Budd Schulberg, and Budd Schulberg said, 'I heard Joe Frazier died [from his injuries].' I called Joe's doctor in Philadelphia, and he said, 'No, Joe was in the hospital and his blood pressure is real high and all, and he's got some blood clots, but he's going to be OK.' When Budd Schulberg told Ali that, Ali said, 'If that happens, I will never fight again.' When they said he was OK, Ali sat down and prayed and thanked Allah for keeping this man alive."

Frazier and Ali had been friends in the 1960s, but they became



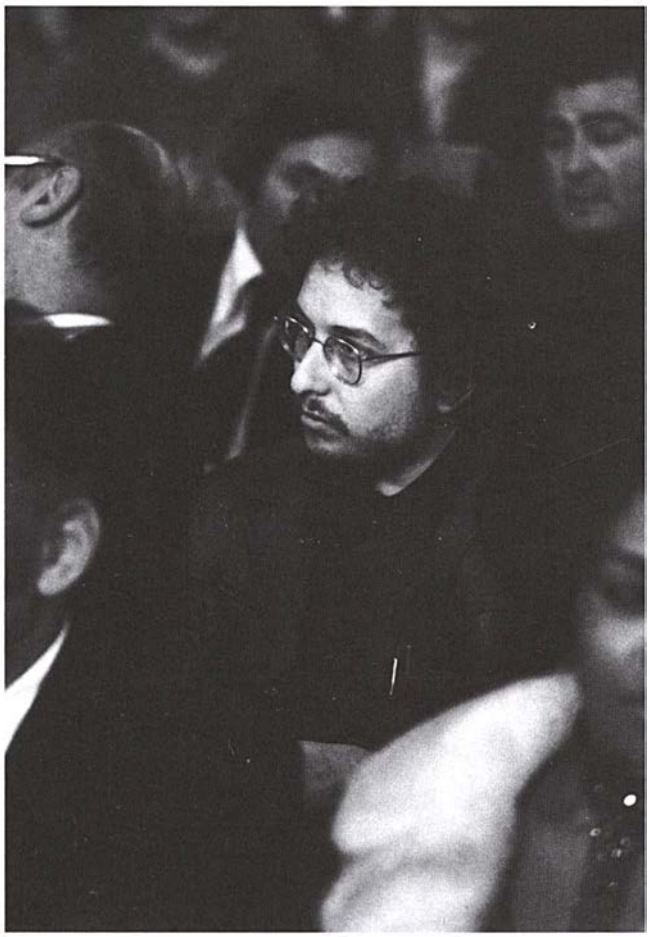
the best of enemies. They elevated one another in the ring and they raised one another's celebrity outside of the ring. Ali could get anti-Frazier headlines going viral (for the time!) with his cruel teasing and taunting.

"You've got to remember about Ali: Ali never disliked anybody," Kilroy explained of the rivalry. "Ali would talk about fighters before the fights to sell tickets, [but] after the fight, they were his best friend, you know. That was Muhammad. He didn't dislike anybody. But I remember years later – I was very close to Joe Frazier – Joe told me, 'How would you like your kids going to school' – he had young kids at the time – 'and kids saying your daddy's a gorilla.' He said, '[Ali] took it too far. I hate him.' He didn't like him. I said, 'Joe, someday, we're going to sit down in a park, the three of us and talk, and we're going to have a good time.' But that never happened."

Instead, the heavyweight icons fought twice more. Ali won both, getting his revenge on points over 12 back in the Garden in 1974 and then taking the decider via stoppage after Round 14 in Manila the following year. They remained at odds, off and on, over the rest of their lives, but after the Fight of the Century, it wasn't known that the two would spend a lifetime inextricably linked.

"There was no indication about a trilogy. Now let me tell you about the second fight ... People ask me what was Ali's best fight. I say the second Frazier fight. The day after that one, we walked all the way down 7th Avenue to Madison Square Garden. Ali had no bruises, no cuts, no bangs; he was dressed sharply and he held a press conference. To me, that was his best fight, when he was not hurt.

"The toughest fight in the world was the one in Manila. I saw those guys banging each other, banging and banging, and I said they should abolish boxing. That was a murder fight – for both fighters."



Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was an interested observer at The Fight.

Ali and Frazier grew old and their paths crossed from time to time. Then, in 2011, Joe died and Ali went to pay his respects.

"I took Muhammad Ali to Joe Frazier's funeral in Philadelphia and the minister who spoke, he was very articulate, he remembered when Howard Cosell said, 'Down goes Frazier! Down goes Frazier!' (when Joe was whipped by George Foreman) – [Cosell] became famous for that – but Muhammad Ali came back and knocked out Foreman, and up came Joe Frazier right after that [to face Ali again]. It was right on tune," smiled Kilroy.

Of course, the Fight of the Century was immortalized for eternity, be it in the written word by the likes of Mailer and Schulberg, on YouTube, or in one of Sinatra's photographs from that night.

"Jilly (Rizzo) had a bar in New York called Jilly's, and they auctioned the pictures off and Sinatra signed them, and they asked Ali and I to go there, and Ali signed the pictures," said Kilroy. "Sinatra liked Ali. He said he didn't like him at first, but everything Muhammad said he would do, Ali did. Sinatra was a big Joe Louis fan. He helped Joe many, many times, and when Ali fought Larry Holmes in Caesars Palace, Sinatra was appearing there and he was sitting ringside about three rows back, and I had a security guard move two chairs over and put them (Louis and Sinatra) right by the ring. Then, Sinatra said that night (after Holmes had beaten the ghost of Ali), 'There's a man in a room upstairs, he has nothing to be ashamed of. He's truly a great man, he has a great heart and he's a champion in and out of the ring'. That was the tribute Sinatra gave to Ali."

Frazier and Ali were two of the great heavyweights of all time. That's undeniable. And on that night in 1971, Frazier was simply the better man.

He won the Fight of the Century against one of the men of the century.

"That night, nobody would have beaten Frazier," said Kilroy. "Nobody, in my opinion."

And for a man who has seen as much as Gene, and who was in the opposite camp, you cannot get any fairer than that.

FOCUS ON SPORT; DYLAN: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

FLESH AND BLOOD

JOE FRAZIER'S FAMILY ALSO ENDURED ABUSE IN THE BUILDUP TO THE ALI FIGHT, BUT ULTIMATELY THEY SHARED IN HIS VINDICATION

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

Regardless of what the reigning heavyweight champion of the world did, his kids had to go to school the next day. Joe Frazier would not have wanted it any other way, despite fighting Muhammad Ali on Monday night, March 8, 1971, at the hub of the universe, a raised illuminated canvas in the middle of Madison Square Garden.

Weatta and Marvis Frazier, two of Joe's children, and Mark and Rodney Frazier, the nephews of "Smokin' Joe," were young kids when Frazier took on "The Greatest" in a clash of unbeaten heavyweights against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and racial and political unrest.

Frazier enjoys some family time with son Marvis, who went on to become a professional fighter himself, in late 1971.

JOHN SHEARER

It was business as usual for Frazier ahead of his biggest-ever fight.

The world was talking about "The Fight."

But to four wide-eyed children, they had no full grasp of what was happening around them. Weatta and Marvis knew TV trucks were constantly pulling up to their home, and talk on the news about Frazier's preparation for the fight was persistent.

It's why the quartet has a greater appreciation for what Frazier did that night, and, more importantly, how he carried himself before and in the aftermath.

Weatta, Marvis, Rodney and Mark's classmates reminded them daily how their "daddy" and their "Uncle Billy" (a nickname Joe inherited from his father, Rubin, who used to call him "Billy Boy" in his youth) was going to get obliterated by Ali.

Joe himself knew the talk. It fueled his anger toward Ali. But his family lived it.

"My father was very protective of all of us, so protective that he actually had Lee Grant Pressley, one of his bodyguards, take us to school every day," recalled Weatta Frazier-Collins, the third of Frazier's children, who was 7 at the time. "My father made sure we were all grounded. We knew something big was happening, but to my father, it was like he was a construction worker going to work every day, 9-to-5 in his hard hat, and then come home.

"I'll tell you, it's difficult for me to watch that fight even today. I know my father fought a major fight and I can't watch those fights, because those fights are still very, very painful for me to see. I remember, looking back, how much of a blessing (Frazier's trainer and manager) Yank Durham was in my father's career. He made sure my father was safe. People also forget my father, this little man, barely 5-foot-10, beat a giant, Muhammad Ali.

"My father always had diabetes, and he could barely see out of one eye. People forget that. It's why he got hit so often. When his sugar levels were off, he had problems. But he had one simple message, and he always said the same thing during that time going into the Ali fight: 'Get the job done.' When Ali hit my dad, it was like he was hitting me.

"I still feel that pain."

Rodney Frazier, the son of Joe's sister Rebecca, had a sense of what was happening. He was 13 at the time and watched the fight with his maternal grandmother, Dolly, on a closed-circuit broadcast in a small, empty arena in Charleston, South Carolina, tickets paid for by Joe.

Dolly was a very stoic person who sat and watched. She saw her son make history in beating Ali for the first time without blinking an eye.

"I remember the turmoil my family went through during that time, and we couldn't win," Rodney, 62, said. "The Blacks were angry at us, and the Whites hated us. I remember sitting with my grandmother and you wouldn't know if her son won or lost. She showed no emotion. It's how my Uncle Billy viewed fighting. You go to work and you do your job.

"My Uncle Billy's victory was a great victory for the family. He took care of all of us. My father was never in my life. Joe was like my father. We came from the rural South and we had so few heroes then, other than Martin Luther King – and my uncle.

"I remember after that fight asking my uncle one day if he was tired fighting Ali that first time. He said he was tired, but he told me, 'If that

motherfucker was going to get up off that stool in the 15th round, I was going to get off the stool. I asked God to help me, but not to help me win. I asked God to help me kill this motherfucker. That man was the devil. I did every good deed that I could for Ali to fight again; I gave him money for his family. The cameras came on and I was a gorilla and an Uncle Tom. He made me so angry that I wanted to kill him.'

"My uncle never liked playing games. Ali played games. I remember him saying all of that stuff very clearly like it happened yesterday. My uncle never had doubts he was going to beat Ali. He went to work and he was partially blind in his left eye, and he had high blood pressure. He was a Type 1 diabetic. He overcame all of that to become world heavyweight champion. Think about that."

Mark Frazier, the son of Joe's brother Tommy, was 12 years old when Frazier-Ali I took place. Mark was living in Harlem, New York, at the time, and he endured endless teasing as a child when the fight was building. Before moving to Philadelphia in 1959, Joe lived for a period of time with Tommy and slept in the same bed as Mark.

In 1970, Ali appeared at Mark's junior high school. Ali called Mark up on stage.

"It was a great moment, because I got to be called on stage with Muhammad Ali, and he was a very gracious guy. He kept asking me if I was a Frazier, and [said] I was 'too pretty to be a Frazier,'" Mark recalled. "That was over 50 years ago and I lived long enough to see that on YouTube. But I remember getting a lot of grief from the kids in school about that fight.

"That night was really cold. My Uncle Billy used to come up and see us in Harlem, but Uncle Billy always had a smooth, calm demeanor. Nothing seemed to phase him. He would laugh and joke about the fight, but he never showed any nervousness. It was always about getting the job done. That's the way he looked at life: If you prepare right, you're going to win. He never had any doubt he would [beat] Muhammad Ali."

Mark and his sister weren't allowed to go to the fight, because they were too young, but they kept getting updates as to how their uncle was doing. When the result arrived, their Harlem street exploded like New Year's Eve.

"It's the first time in my life I couldn't wait to go to school and remind everyone that bad-mouthed my uncle and let them know that my Uncle Billy was the heavyweight king of the world," Mark recalled. "A month later, we went down to Philly to see him, and you wouldn't know he was the heavyweight champion of the world. He was still the same."

The sporting feud continued with daughters Jacqui Frazier-Lyde (left) and Layla Ali.

Marvis Frazier was 10 when his father fought Ali at Madison Square Garden. Joe wouldn't permit his son to go to the fight, fearing something might happen to Marvis.

"I remember every day, he would get up for a morning run and really treat it like it was any other fight," Marvis said. "My dad didn't talk too much about the fight. There were a lot of people around the house and I didn't even get a chance to watch the fight live. We heard that my daddy won the fight. I remember having to go to school the next day.

"My dad wouldn't let us take a day off from school. My dad was strict like that. That Tuesday, I was right there in class and I remember all of the kids coming up to me congratulating me about my dad winning. I found out a lot of people cheered for my dad, too.

"I remember seeing all of these TV cameras and all of these TV trucks around our house the next day. I didn't really know what was going on then, but I knew my dad won that fight. It's a night that changed our family."

Tamyra Frazier, Marvis' 36-year-old daughter and Joe's granddaughter, has a graduate degree and is working on her PhD. Jacqui Frazier-Lyde, Joe's oldest daughter, is a Philadelphia municipal court judge. Numerous Fraziers have gone on to get college degrees, all coming from a man who worked the fields in South Carolina.

"I watched that fight many times, and I think back that whatever drive my grandfather had, I have," Tamyra said. "You know, a lot of people my age think Ali won that first fight. I'm a mom now with two kids (8 and 9, a boy and a girl). They're just starting to learn about their great-grandfather. Sometimes, society picks our heroes and our winners, and forget that there are a lot more Joe Fraziers in the world – who don't get the recognition that they deserve – than Muhammad Alis.

"My grandfather is a part of history. You can't undo history. No matter who or what people may think, Joe Frazier was the first one to beat Muhammad Ali. That will always be a part of my family."

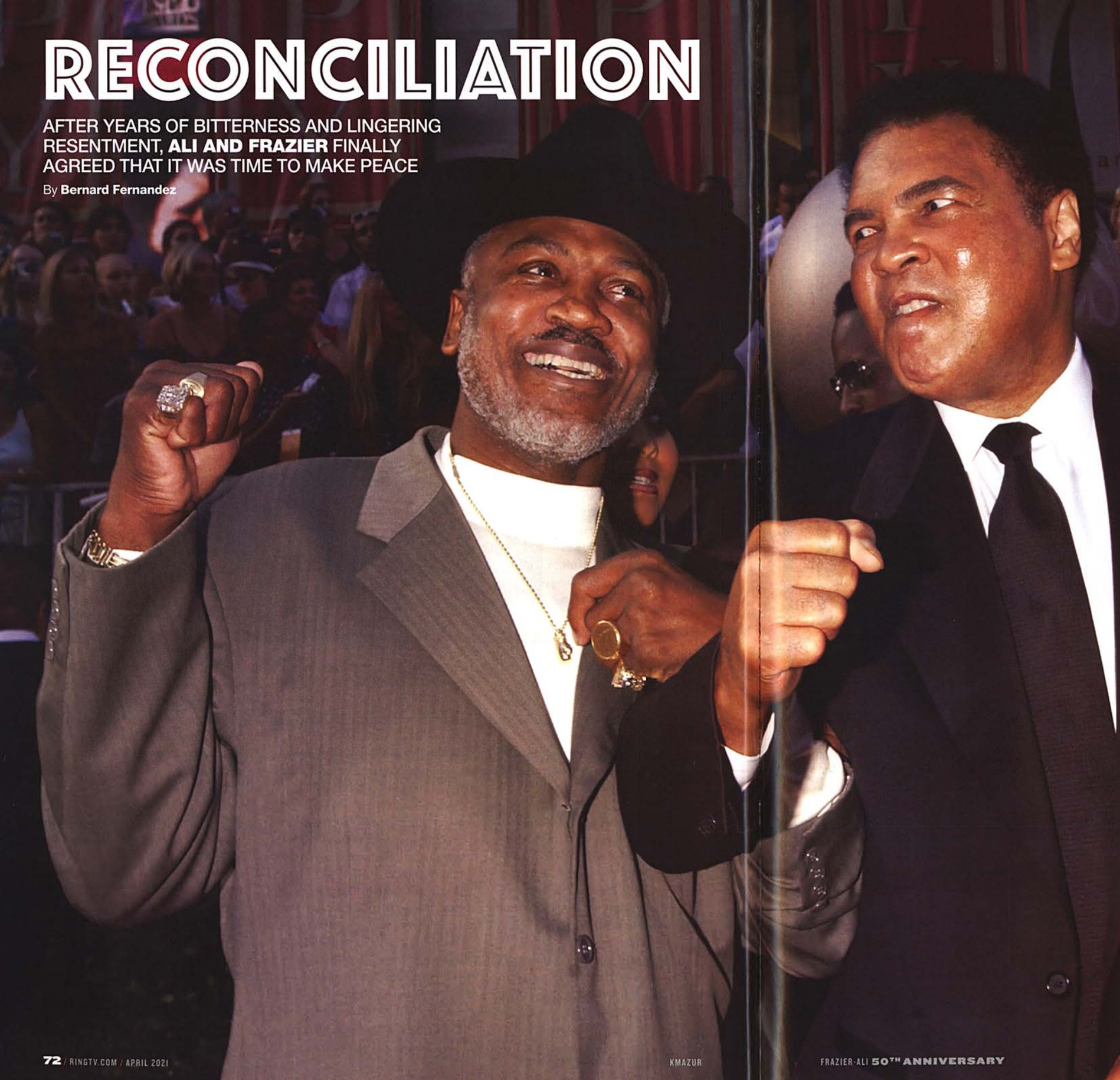
Joseph Santoliquito is an award-winning sportswriter who has been working for The Ring Magazine/ RingTV.com since October 1997 and is the president of the Boxing Writers Association of America. He can be followed on Twitter @JSantoliquito.

GETTY IMAGES

RECONCILIATION

AFTER YEARS OF BITTERNESS AND LINGERING RESENTMENT, **ALI AND FRAZIER** FINALLY AGREED THAT IT WAS TIME TO MAKE PEACE

By **Bernard Fernandez**



KMAZUR

These are the most widely recognized lords of conflict, forever at odds with one another in life, legend, lore and literature: Hatfields vs. McCoys, Earps vs. Clantons, Luke Skywalker vs. Darth Vader, Montagues vs. Capulets, Tupac vs. Biggie. In some cases, the friction never rose beyond the threshold of fierce rivalry borne of grudging mutual respect; in others, the animosity was so deep-rooted it crossed over into the ugliness of open hatred.

In sports and specifically boxing, the foremost example of a battle that extended beyond the competitive arena is the justly celebrated three-act passion play involving heavyweight icons Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, whose pride and determination were such that they brought one another to the brink of physical and maybe even psychological ruin. But what transpired inside the ropes, the blood spilled and the lumps raised, only tells part of the story. It was the unnecessarily cruel war of words that was waged over decades between two former friends turned bitter enemies, neither of whom was inclined to yield an inch, that by turns elevated an already remarkable feud into one for the ages. Any number

Two great ring generals finally catch up, decades after their wars.

of would-be arbitrators attempted to bridge the chasm separating "The Greatest" and "Smokin' Joe," their efforts routinely falling flat when one spiteful man or the other declined any offer to meet somewhere in the middle to negotiate a truce that would be acceptable to both.

But miracles can and do happen, sometimes when they are least expected, and such a convergence of hope and destiny occurred on February 8 and 9, 2002, in an unlikely setting, the night before and then the night of the 53rd annual NBA All-Star Game in Frazier's adopted hometown of Philadelphia. Maybe it was because the long-hardened stances of Ali and Frazier had simultaneously softened, or maybe it was because two proud and unrelenting old warriors finally realized that continuing to snipe at one another had ceased to be interesting theater and had devolved into something that only served to diminish each.

Press agent Darren Prince, who in the mid-1990s had taken on both Ali and Frazier as clients, was an amazed witness to what many people had thought was an accord that would forever be beyond the realm of reality.

"Over the course of five-and-a-half or six years, when I was affiliated with each of them, I would throw it (the suggestion of a reconciliation) out there," Prince said in an interview with The Ring. "Some days it would gather momentum, some days it wouldn't. There was a New York Times story that came out in 2001 where Muhammad said he would apologize to Joe for anything bad he had said about him. He said, 'Joe's a good man. If God ever called me, I'd tell Him I'd want Joe right beside me (in the afterlife that awaits everyone).' That was an opening, so I called Joe and read him the story. He was amenable to a meeting, but he insisted it had to be in Philly. He said, 'You got to tell the damn Butterfly (Joe's most common reference to Ali) we got to meet on my turf.' It just chilled me, the level of distrust that still existed on his part.

"But here we were, the morning before the All-Star Game, and I got a call that Lonnie (Ali's fourth wife) and Muhammad were agreeable to a meeting if Joe was actually into it. I was told Joe, Marvis and I were invited to come to Ali's hotel suite

in Philadelphia for dinner. I was shaking with excitement and anxiety; I didn't want to call Joe about it just yet because I had a corporate event for the All-Star Game that day. But when I saw Joe that afternoon and told him about it, he said, without hesitation, 'All right, man, let's go see the Butterfly. It's time.'"

Maybe what transpired from that point on was a virtual reenactment of when Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee sat down in Appomattox, Virginia, to sign the peace treaty that ended the Civil War. For all the bitterness that had gone before, it really was time for the principals in a confrontation that had gone on far too long to recognize that the thread that had united them all along was an admiration for their shared strengths, and that continuing to bleed one another dry no longer served any useful purpose.

"From the minute we knocked on the hotel door, Lonnie greeted everybody with hugs," Prince continued. "Joe walked over to Muhammad. They were both smiling. Ali was very overweight because of his diet and the Parkinson's medications he was on. It was tough for Ali to get up. Joe said, 'Hey, man, you OK? You want me to give you a hand?' Muhammad nodded, and when Joe leaned over, they just hugged. You could see how emotional they were getting. Lonnie said, 'Thank you for coming, Joe. Muhammad finally has found peace.'

"About 20 minutes into dinner, Ali started biting his bottom lip and went, 'Joe Fray-shuh! I'm gonna get the gorilla again in Manila!' Joe dropped his fork and said, in jest, 'Man, we just made peace. Do I have to whip your ass again?'

"We probably spent a couple of hours together. Howard Bingham (Ali's personal photographer and best friend) took a bunch of photos, and then we left. But before we did, Marvis started talking. Joe stopped him and said, 'Son, I got this.' Everyone shut their eyes and Joe – I'll never forget the words – said, 'Dear Lord, we have forgotten (past animosities) and we have forgiven. I ask you to heal this man for the millions of fans and people he's made happy around the world and his family and friends that love him. I ask you to please give him the life that he deserves and make him healthy.' We were all in tears."

But those private moments were played out again in a far more public setting the next night at the All-Star Game, when arrangements were made for the Ali and Frazier parties to be seated together at center court.

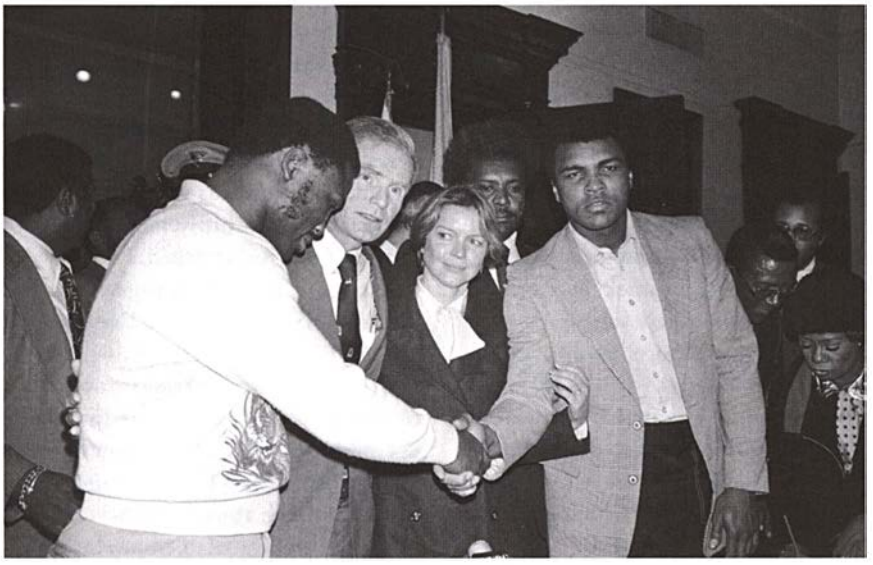
"Joe and Muhammad held hands when Alicia Keys sang "America the Beautiful,'" Prince said. "It was just unbelievable. Justin Timberlake, Britney Spears, Allen Iverson, Kobe (Bryant), Michael Jordan, Magic (Johnson), who's a dear friend and client of mine, all came over to take a photo with Muhammad and Joe. They understood how historic this was.

"I don't think Joe and Muhammad even cared about the game, they were so busy chatting it up. They got a standing ovation after the players were introduced. Muhammad said to Joe, 'We're still two badass brothers, aren't we?' And Joe said, 'Yes, we are.'"

The closest previous brush with peace in their time came in the lead-up to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, a seemingly fertile breeding ground for compromise as both Ali, who was still known as Cassius Clay when he took a gold medal in Rome in 1960, and Frazier, a gold medalist in Tokyo in 1964, had that distinction in common. Couldn't two American Olympic heroes just once make nice for an Olympiad held on American soil? The premise certainly seemed reasonable. But the more he thought about it, Frazier seethed when Ali, his speech slurred and his motor functions impaired by the progressive effects of Parkinson's disease, was selected to carry the Olympic torch the last few steps to ignite the flame during the opening ceremony.

Asked by a reporter what he thought of his old archrival, whose deteriorating health had made him an even more sympathetic and culturally significant global figure, getting the high-visibility Olympic gig, a defiant Frazier sneered and said, "I wish I could have pushed him into the fire."

That response by Frazier tilted public opinion, a pendulum that swung both ways at various junctures, against him again. Joe's son Marvis, a former heavyweight contender, had been gently prodding the man he lovingly called Pop to either extend or accept any gesture toward reconciliation because ... well, just because. Now an ordained minister, Marvis, as much as anyone, understood the detrimental ramifications of comments that sting



Together in 1975 to protest the murder conviction of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter.

as much or even more as any punch ever could. In the lead-up to the first meeting of his father and Ali, the much-hyped "Fight of the Century" on March 8, 1971, in Madison Square Garden, Ali had, in an article that appeared in Sports Illustrated, humiliated, enraged and ultimately isolated Frazier, casting him as a shuffling and mumbling Uncle Tom, an ugly and ignorant errand boy for White America. Part of the fallout from Ali's campaign of denigration was for Marvis' Black classmates, most of whom also had fallen under Ali's spell, to repeat the slurs made about his father to him and his siblings. And that, Frazier decided, was something he could not and would not abide.

Exacerbating the situation was the fact that Frazier, who had ascended to the heavyweight championship after Ali was stripped of his title and his passport for refusing induction into the U.S. Army, had helped keep his future archrival financially afloat by lending him money. During the interim, Smokin' Joe not only became chummy with Ali, he testified before Congress on Ali's behalf and even petitioned President Richard Nixon to have Ali's boxing license reinstated.

"[Ali would] come to my gym and call me on the telephone," Frazier told Sports Illustrated's Mark Kram Sr. "He just wanted to work with me for the publicity so he could get his license back. One time, after the Ellis fight (Frazier stopped Jimmy Ellis in four rounds on February 16, 1970), I drove him from Philadelphia to New York City in my car. Me and him. We talked about how much we were going to make out of our fight. We were laughin' and havin' fun. We were friends; we were great friends. I said, 'Why not? Come on, man, let's do it!' He was a brother."

All that changed when Ali was reinstated and the epic showdown with Frazier went from theoretical to signed-and-sealed eventuality. Although a Frazier confidante, Butch Lewis, assured Joe that Ali was just doing his thing to help build interest in a megafight that didn't require much salesmanship, Frazier felt his humanity and manhood had been personally besmirched.

"Yes, I tommed," a bitter Frazier said in the SI article. "When he asked me to help him get a license, I tommed for him. For him! He betrayed my friendship. He called me stupid. He said I was so ugly that my mother ran and hid when she gave birth to me. I was shocked. I sat down and said to myself, 'I'm gonna kill him. OK? Simple as that. I'm gonna kill him!'"

Even in Frazier's greatest moment of professional glory, the unanimous decision over Ali that was punctuated by the leaping left hook that floored Ali in the 15th round, Frazier found only a sampling of the satisfaction he believed should have been his. To many, the main thing that they recognized from what arguably was the most anticipated heavyweight showdown ever was not Smokin' Joe's victory, but the incredible courage Ali had shown in rising swiftly after a devastating knockdown that would have left almost any other opponent down for the count.

Then again, although they were equals, or very nearly so, in their three bouts, the other two of which were won by Ali, in the cauldron of the squared circle, there was no way Joe Frazier ever was going to come away as a full partner with a larger-than-life figure whose charisma matched his exquisite talent. Wrote Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Halberstam: "Technically the loser of two of the three fights, [Frazier] seems not to understand that they ennobled him as much as they did Ali, that the only way we know of Ali's greatness is because of Frazier's equivalent greatness, that in the end there is no real difference between them as fighters."

Being forever cast as Tonto to Ali's Lone Ranger continued to be the burr under Frazier's figurative saddle, and that of his children. For the New York City world premiere of the biopic Ali on December 17, 2001, one of Joe's daughters, Jacqui Frazier-Lyde, chafed at the screen depiction of Ali being offered money by her father and refusing to accept it because he was too proud to do so.

"Yeah, right," Frazier-Lyde said of that scene. She also complained of a passage in a promotional booklet in which the movie's director, Michael Mann, advised prospective viewers to "forget what you think you know."

"It's [not] easy to forget what you think you know when you actually do know," she said.

"My whole life, I have watched Joe Frazier get sabotaged by the Muhammad Ali propaganda machine. It's not a balanced portrayal. It never has been. It wasn't then and it isn't now. Look, I have no problem with Muhammad Ali and the Ali family. I really don't. It's just that I wish my father's role in Muhammad Ali's life wasn't always reduced or distorted. Every magazine cover I ever saw had Ali punching Frazier and not getting punched back. Why is it always that way?"

It is that way because, like Boston Celtics superstar Larry Bird in his head-to-head matchups with the Los Angeles Lakers' Magic Johnson, which Prince cites as the sporting world's foremost individual rivalry outside of Ali-Frazier, Bird, a gifted but decidedly unglitzy farm boy from Indiana in comparison to the spotlight-loving Magic, found that circumstances dictate who gets to be the "A side" and who has to settle for being the "B side." The B side can win his share of duels on the floor or in the ring, but in the court of public opinion, the Alis and Magics are almost always unconquerable.

It had been Frazier's wish to at least outlive Ali, which presumably would have been a testament to what he believed would be his more enduring earthly staying power, but that also was not to be. Smokin' Joe was 67 when he passed away on November 7, 2011, while Ali, although a shadow of his formerly vibrant self, hung on until June 3, 2016, when he also was outpointed by the Grim Reaper at the age of 74. But it spoke volumes as to the lasting peace they had jointly brokered that Ali, accompanied by Lonnie, made the arduous trip from his home in Michigan to attend his foremost rival's funeral service. His appearance there was marked by solemn reverence and respect, not belligerence and bombast.

Eighteenth-century poet Alexander Pope wrote that to err is human, to forgive is divine. Given all that had passed between them, in death, as in life, Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier should be forever memorialized for demonstrating that forgiveness is the balm that can salve even the most festering of real or imagined wounds.

With Ken Norton and Larry Holmes on the Champions Forever tour.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

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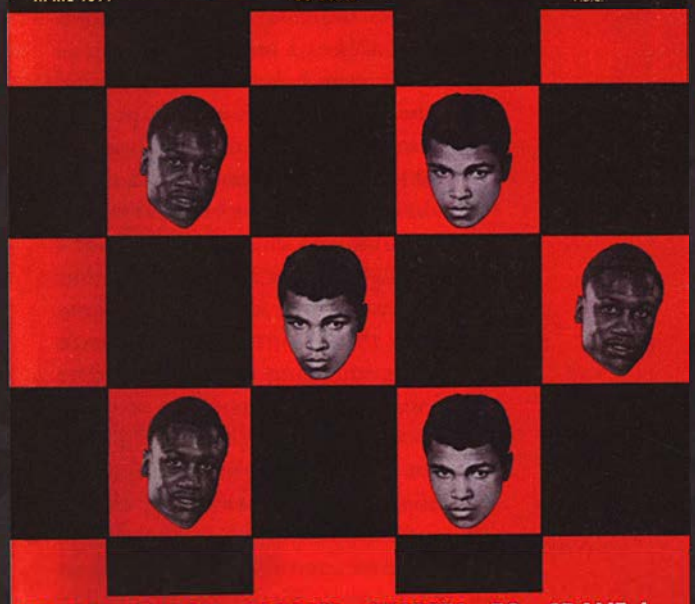

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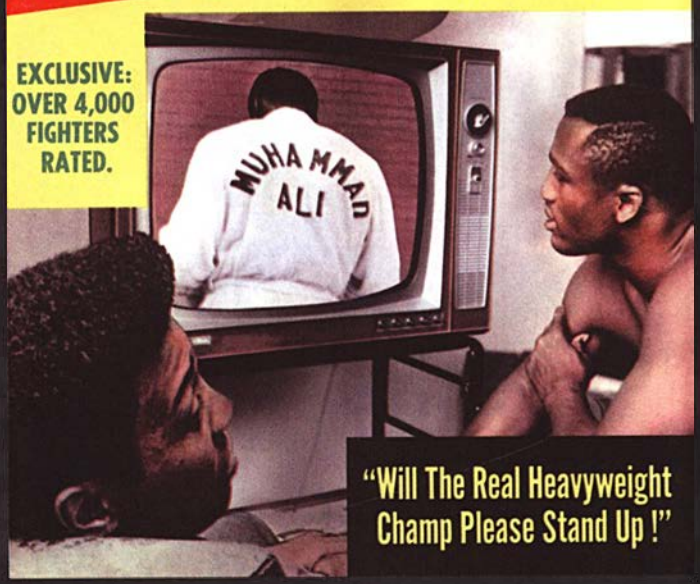

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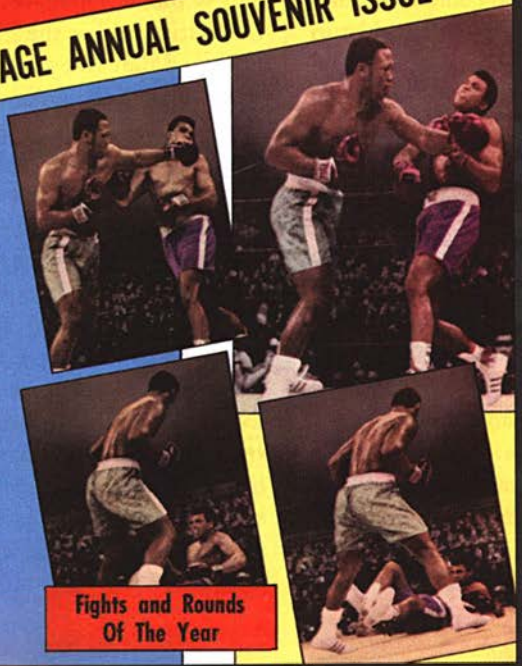

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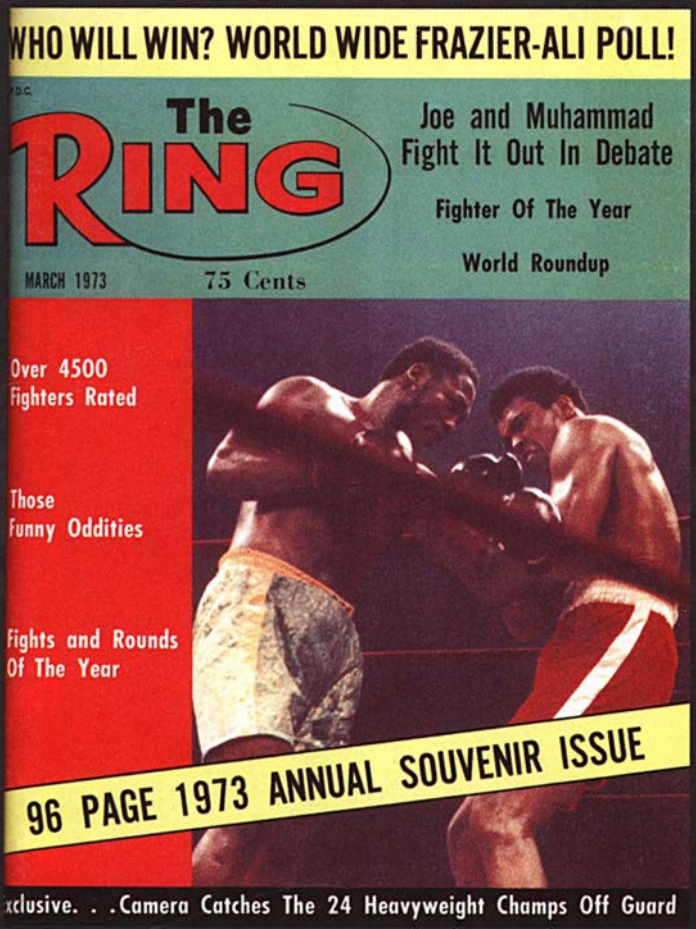
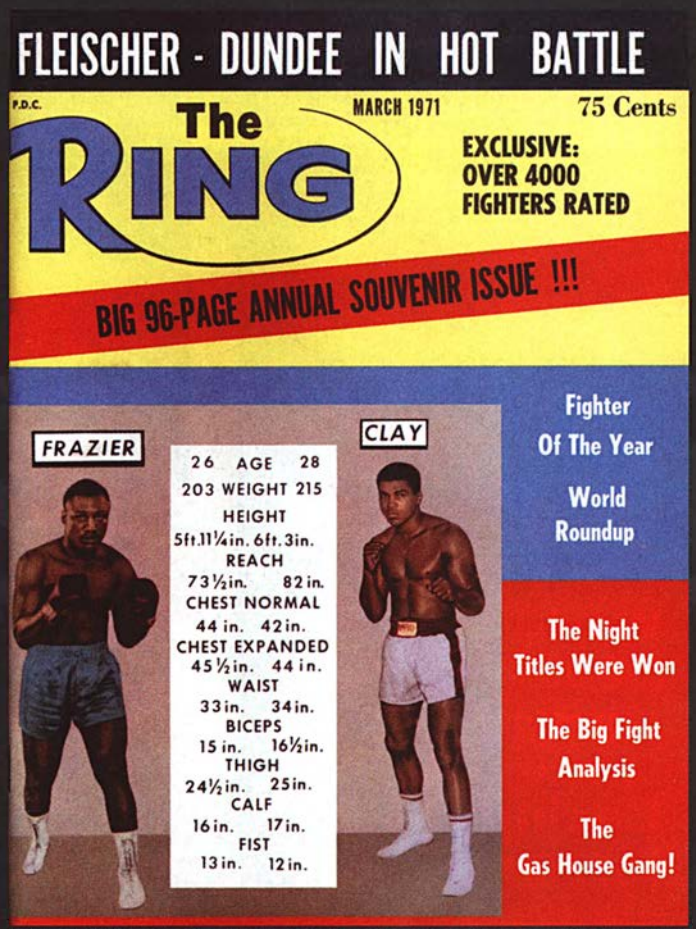
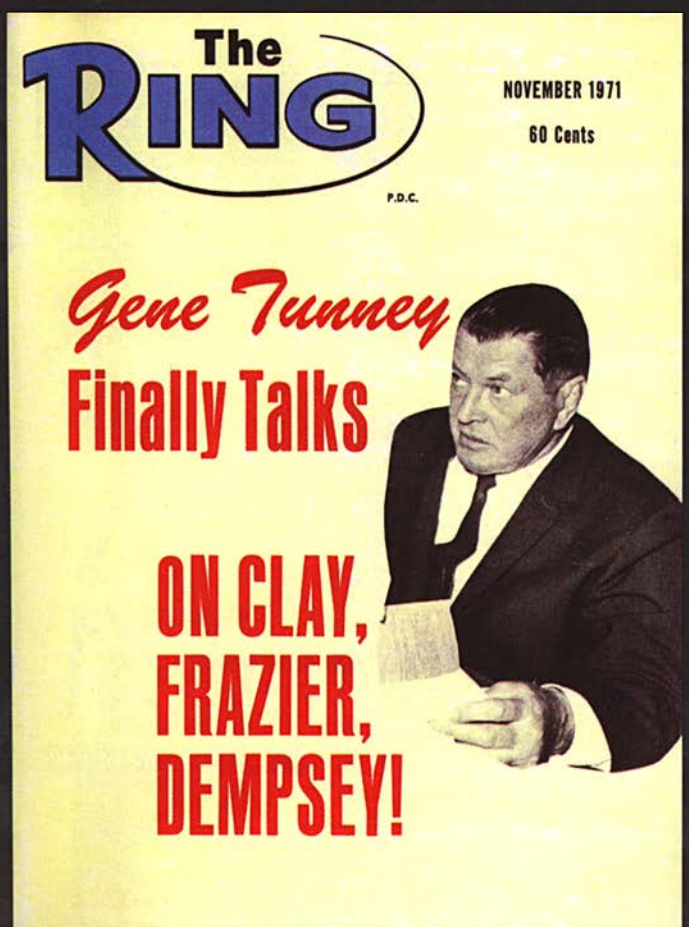
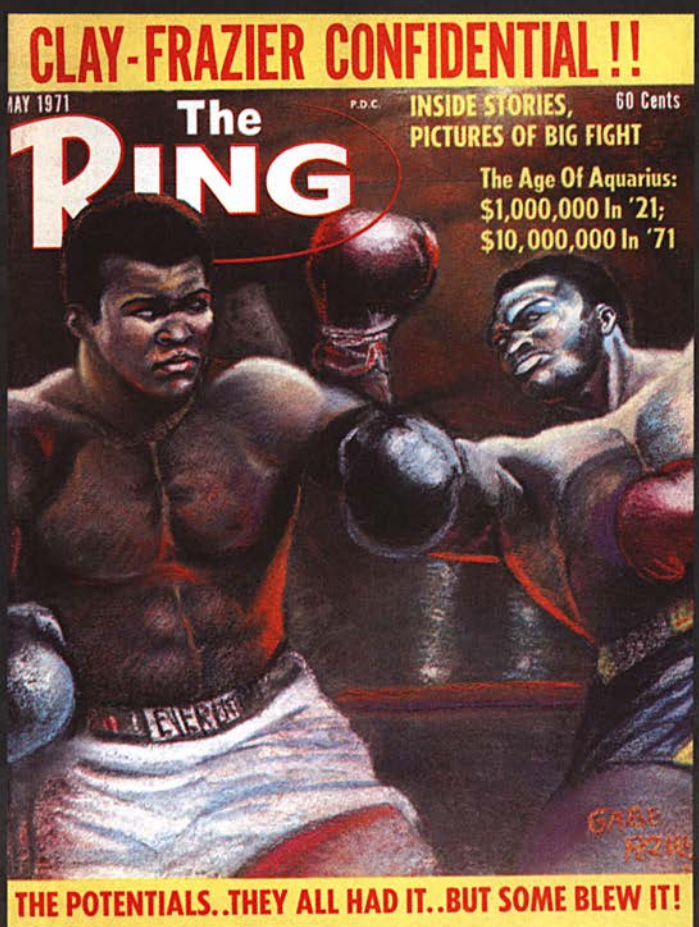
"I WOULD HAVE BEATEN CLAY, FRAZIER WILL !"

FIGHT OF A LIFETIME: The Fight of the Century was a Ring Magazine cover story before, during and after March 8, 1971. Its scale has never been equaled.









COMING UP

Oscar Valdez (left) and Miguel Berchelt will finally throw down on February 20 in Las Vegas.

FEBRUARY

FEB. 13 – Joseph Diaz vs. Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov, junior lightweights (for Diaz's IBF title), Indio, Calif. (DAZN). Also, Patrick Teixeira vs. Brian Castano, junior middleweights (for Teixeira's WBO title).

FEB. 19 – Liam Walsh vs. Paul Hyland Jr., lightweights, Bolton, U.K. (ESPN+).

FEB. 20 – Miguel Berchelt vs. Oscar Valdez, junior lightweights (for Berchelt's WBC title), Las Vegas (ESPN).

FEB. 27 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Avni Yildirim, super middleweights (for Alvarez's Ring/WBA/WBC titles), Miami (DAZN).

FEB. 27 – Joseph Parker vs. Junior Fa, heavyweights, Auckland, New Zealand (DAZN).

FEB. 27 – Jamel Herring vs. Carl Frampton, junior lightweights (for Herring's WBO title), London (ESPN+).

MARCH

MARCH 6 – Alexander Povetkin vs. Dillian Whyte, heavyweights, U.K. location TBA at press time (DAZN).

MARCH 13 – Juan Francisco Estrada vs. Roman Gonzalez, junior bantamweights (for Estrada's Ring/WBC and Gonzalez's WBA titles), Dallas (DAZN). Also, Hiroto Kyoguchi vs. Axel Aragon Vega, junior flyweights (for Kyoguchi's Ring/WBA titles); Jessica McCaskill vs. Cecilia Braekhus, welterweights (for McCaskill's Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO titles).

MARCH 20 – Lawrence Okolie vs. Krzysztof Glowacki, cruiserweights (for vacant WBO title), U.K. location TBA at press time (DAZN).

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